

# **Significance in History: Students' Ideas in England and Spain**

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*A Eduardo Cercadillo, filósofo, tío y padrino.*

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## ABSTRACT

Historical learning is affected by cultural features and differences in educational systems. This is a comparative analysis of the progression of students' ideas in the understanding of historical significance, between two countries of the European Union, England and Spain. The research was intended to establish an empirically grounded model of progression in an area hitherto not investigated, namely significance within accounts. Progression was evaluated in two aspects: a) the relationship between significance and accounts (the significance of an event in rival historical narratives); and b) its variability of attributions, or types of significance (the different assessments of significance). This study was carried out with a sample of English and Spanish 12 to 17 year-old students. Methods followed were mainly qualitative, but the scale of the sample also allowed some quantitative analysis.

The analysis of the relationship between significance and accounts concentrated on several notions: *intrinsicallity/contextuality*; *importance*; *emplotment and story parameters*; *point of view*; and *validity and truth*. Empirical data allowed the development of level-scales for each concept. Progression was found in all these areas, both for English and for Spanish students. However, cross-cultural differences were evident for some concepts, levels and age, in particular for *importance* and *point of view*. English students became aware of these concepts at earlier ages and in higher numbers than Spanish ones.

Five types of historical significance, *contemporary*, *causal*, *pattern*, *symbolic*, and *present/future* were defined. A further model of progression was generated through a qualitative analysis. This model comprises different levels, from responses that indicate no awareness of the notion of importance, and make no allusion to any type, or refer to the contemporary type only, towards responses that establish some kind of criteria to assess significance in different contexts and mention various types. The comparison of English and Spanish students' responses indicated several qualitative differences regarding types of significance and progression: *pattern*, *symbolic* and *present/future* types were more frequently mentioned amongst English participants in all year groups; and they reached a higher order of ideas at an earlier age than Spanish ones.



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## 0. INTRODUCTION

The project *Significance in History: Students' Ideas in England and Spain* is concerned with the field of history in education, in particular, with history learning at secondary school level in two countries of the European Union, England<sup>1</sup> and Spain.

This study focuses on a comparative analysis of progression in the understanding of a specific second-order concept, historical significance. This kind of research belongs to a tradition --originally British-- of qualitative studies developed around the understanding of structural concepts in history education. The comparative approach works at two levels: first, in the relationship between two educational systems, those from England and Spain; second, in the comparison of cognitive development across three bands of age: 12-13, 14-15 and 16-17 years.

Although the practice of history teaching in each country may diverge, the premises upon which the history curriculum is built are rather similar in both countries, after the reformist movements that took place in the early 1990s. The idea of progression rests on a constructivist model, in which second-order concepts organize substantive knowledge and understanding. The study of history involves pupils: 1) in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding within a chronological and referential framework; 2) in having respect for evidence and the pursuit of historical objectivity; and 3) in understanding that history is subject to constant reinterpretation and that there is no monopoly of the truth (DES, 1990; MEC, 1989).

Initial work to carry out this cross-cultural and cross-sectional study focused on three main strands of structural or second-order concepts: *rational understanding*, *causal explanation* (particularly *causal weighting*) and *significance* in history (see Chapter 3). In the light of the current state of research and the provisional results arising from pilot studies, the central interest of this research became students' ideas about *historical significance*, including causal significance and other aspects, such as contemporary, pattern and symbolic notions of significance together with its connections with the present, and its relationship to *historical accounts*.

Two main sources contribute to attain a definition of the notion of significance in this project: the theoretical discussion held by philosophers and historians, and the empirical

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<sup>1</sup> 'England' rather than 'Britain', because Scotland, England and Wales have their own distinct National Curricula.

analysis of students' ideas. 'Significance' is at the heart of the subject matter of both academic and school history; it is fundamental to understand a distinctive feature of the discipline: discrete events are not understandable without their link to a frame of reference and a sense of authorship behind them. Academic and school history are not the same thing, but reducing the gap between both 'histories' becomes necessary to reach a more sophisticated historical understanding<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the idea of contextuality and the relativization of historical knowledge are important for students to realize the implications of the (re) construction of the past by historians. Teachers need to confront the question of how historical interpretations differ and why, because this has turned into a core issue in history curricula in Europe and North America. However, in contrast to other structural concepts such as empathy or causality, the notion of significance has been inexplicably neglected until very recently in the domain of history education research (see Chapter 1).

'Significance' is a key concept in any exploration of students' ideas about the general question of interpretations and progress in the construction of historical knowledge. This concept is defined through questions such as: what makes things significant in history?; is significance in history seen only as fixed, as an intrinsic value of historical occurrences?; or is significance viewed as tied to context, as a referential value? Students' ideas about significance can be ordered across these extreme (and additional middle) stages, in a process which sums up, at least, two variables: cognitive development and teaching/learning experiences (along with influences from outside school). The extent to what these ideas may be similar or may diverge when arising in two different European countries was one of the goals of this work.

Specific aims of the present study were:

- 1) exploring English and Spanish pupils' understanding of a particular historical second-order concept, *significance*, in its different attributions, and in its relationship to historical accounts;
- 2) categorizing and mapping the understanding of these concepts to delineate *patterns of progression* in history learning in two countries, England and Spain;
- 3) investigating the possible *similarities* and *differences* in the categorized ideas of progression in both countries.

Grounded on empirical data, the delineation of patterns of progression may provide a coherent framework to the history curriculum and assessment at secondary school. It can also contribute to elaborate a more homogeneous design of history curricula across European countries, not just in content but, most importantly, in historical understanding.

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<sup>2</sup> Education is necessarily normative, but school history has to point in a certain direction; this should be academic history (Jenkins, 1996).

Chapter 1 offers an overview of some generic lines of research in cognition and specific research relevant to history education in Britain, North America and Spain, particularly with regard to students' thinking and ideas. It also refers to the place of the concept of significance in the history curricula of two different educational systems, English and Spanish.

Chapter 2 discusses the concept of significance in historical accounts from a theoretical and philosophical perspective, related to other notions such as narrative, meaning, explanation, interpretation and validity/truth, along with the study of concrete attributions or types of significance.

Chapter 3 establishes the methodological assumptions of this investigation in cognitive, epistemological and comparative terms, and describes five cycles of exploratory and pilot studies previous to the final data collection for the main study.

Chapter 4 describes the methods of the main empirical study and the elaboration and targeting of the research tools deployed for that study. In addition, it synthesizes the preliminary categorization of main data responses.

Chapter 5 sets up the theoretical and empirical framework within which data analysis is carried out, considering two kinds of categorization; first, with regard to the relationship between significance and accounts; second, concerning several types of attributions of significance.

Chapter 6 presents a quantitative and qualitative study of the concept of significance in students' ideas in allusion to its relationship to accounts. Level-scales of progression are proposed and particular examples of levels of progression are discussed, grounded on the following categories: intrinsicality/contextuality, importance, emplotment and story parameters, point of view and validity and truth.

Chapter 7 analyzes, both quantitatively and qualitatively, students' responses with regard to their ideas about different types of significance, namely, contemporary, causal, pattern, symbolic and significance for the present and future. A level-scale of progression is also proposed and specific examples glossed in this chapter.

Chapter 8 revises the final models of progression based on empirical data and discusses some possible implications for teaching and further research.

# 1. ACADEMIC AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

## 1.0. Introduction

In the past few decades, research in history teaching and learning, especially in the English speaking world, has been built upon two bases. The first is the structure of knowledge, more specifically, the debates on the nature of history, which inform the way in which history is framed into the school curriculum. The second is children's and adolescents' intellectual development and learning. How do students learn history? How does the process of development of thinking towards historical understanding take place? More recently, research on history learning has shifted from 'thinking' to 'ideas'. What are the concepts and conceptual patterns that students hold upon which they build new knowledge and understanding? What sets of ideas do they employ to handle historical tasks?

This kind of research is rooted in various traditions that have developed innovative educational theory and teaching practices related to history, both by psychologists and subject matter specialists. These traditions include the *new history* movement in England (in the 1970s and 1980s), studies linked to the recent educational reform in Spain (in the 1980s and 1990s), research from a cognitive approach to learning in the last decade in North America, and current research in England.

Research in students' ideas has guided or run parallel to curriculum development in Europe and the Western world. New curricula in history have paid attention not only to what students should know in substantive historical content, but also to how they think and learn about the past and their own place in time, what could be defined as structural concepts and attitudes, or 'ideas'. In order to assess substantive knowledge, specific historical understanding and attitudes, patterns of progression are needed. But these must be grounded, among other sources, on empirical research.

As stated above, this study aims at comparing the acquisition of historical second-order concepts between two countries of the European Union, to explore the basis of progression in students' understanding of history (in a particular concept: significance) and to investigate possible differences and similarities arising from cultural diversity. As a starting-point to attain these goals, two previous conditions are needed: a review of the

current state of the art in the field of research in students' ideas about history, and a description of the educational context in which this research is framed.

This chapter is structured in the following sections: first, a brief sketch of the generic research done in the field of children's thinking, relevant to history education. Second, a summary of studies conducted by British scholars, forerunners in the area of history learning at school, and a reference to current investigations in that country. Third, a mention of recent advances in the area in Spain and North America. The last regard will be an allusion to the educational systems of the two countries of interest for this study, England and Spain.

### **1.1. Generic research in students' thinking and learning**

Until recently, educational research in Europe had not been particularly interested in the discipline of history, maybe because of the inherent difficulties that the lack of agreement among experts on what history was entailed. But history education researchers were to be influenced in various degrees by the work of psychologists and pedagogues, especially by those who followed the *cognitive* approach. This emphasized understanding of concepts and theories in different subject matter domains and general cognitive abilities, such as reasoning, planning, solving problems and comprehending language.

For a long time, the dominant figure in the field was Piaget, whose work indisputably impinged on teachers and educators, but whose research focused neither in history nor in any school subject as such; his main interests were epistemological (the relationship between the acquisition of knowledge and mental structures), not educational.

Piaget saw the development of human intelligence as the conquest of an extended environment, based on an *equilibrium* that was reached through the actions of assimilation and accommodation. That conquest was achieved by *stages*; the order of stages is the same in each individual, although the speed can be different; one stage has to be consolidated before the next can be reached. From early adolescence to adulthood, in Piagetian terms, students would be situated in the transition from the *concrete operational stage* to the *formal operational stage*, reaching the equilibrium point at about 14-15 years. The simplest manifestation of formal thinking is adolescents' new capacity to orient themselves toward what is abstract and not immediately present; it is the "third process of decentering", where they acquire the capacity to use both deduction and experimental induction. Then the

capacity to comprehend certain concepts is limited by the child's or adolescent's level of logical-deductive development (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958).

Other researchers dismissed the notion of cognitive development as centered on internal, individual characteristics. Vygotsky stressed the fundamental importance of other kinds of influences, such as the social environment, the educational context of the learning process. Vygotsky argued that all high psychological processes (language, reasoning, etc.) are acquired first in a social context and internalized later. That internalization is precisely a product of the use of a particular cognitive behaviour in a social context. Then what an individual learns not only depends on his/ her individual activity, but also on his/her social interactions (Vygotsky, 1985).

If Piaget said that what a child learns is conditioned to his developmental cognitive level, Vygotsky argued that levels of development are determined by learning. Both Piaget's and Vygotsky's ideas would shape a constructivist framework for research and curriculum formulating, based on conceptual understanding. *Constructivism* highlights that students' learning must be viewed as transforming significant understanding that they already have, rather than as simple acquisitions written on blank slates.

Starting from this theory, a stream of research focused on identifying organizing themes and concepts and studying how students could best come to understand them. This trend was implanted (mainly in the USA) in *Gestalt psychology*, which searched for conceptual structures that should become central in school curriculum (Wertheimer, 1945). Psychologists allied with subject matter specialists engaged in efforts to define curriculum in a particular subject, rather than concentrating on more generic theories of learning. But they studied processes of meaningful learning in mathematics and natural sciences, not yet in history or social sciences.

An example of this was the American educationist Bruner. Like Piaget, he was not especially interested in history as a school discipline, but in implementing science teaching. Nevertheless, Bruner's ideas had important implications for educational theory in general and for the teaching of history in particular. He believed there had been an underestimation of the ability of children to learn, when the Piagetian model was strictly followed at school. His famous assertion: "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" challenged the Piagetian view of different cognitive developmental levels, whose maturation was internal.

Basic knowledge could be learned inductively, from examples, grounded on the structure of the subject, from the particular to the general by means of rules or hypotheses. If the structural skills and principles (ideas) were grasped, transfer would be easier and pupils would be able to perform more complex tasks than those they originally learned. The learning of fundamental ideas made feasible the establishment of progression in different

levels of education (*spiral curriculum*), which implied continuity and development in the learning process (Bruner, 1960, 1966).

Therefore, children's understanding in the domain of *concepts* of a subject matter might provide a more important guide for the organization of curricula and teaching than did the stage they had reached in developing their general operational abilities in reasoning. In *history*, for instance, active learning should be related to models of explanation and understanding based on children's and adolescents' ideas underlying their own explanations.

## **1.2. History research in students' thinking and ideas: Britain**

### **1.2.1. The Piagetian model and its critics**

Early British research in history was mainly grounded on Piaget's theories. The application of the Piagetian developmental model of thought to history led to a series of studies in the 1960s and the 1970s.

One of the most widely reported, that of Hallam, concluded that internal maturation, not teaching strategies, was basically needed to see significant improvement in pupils' understanding. For instance, students need the preliminary information and necessary cognitive skills for discussion to be fruitful in class; they need to be near the formal operational level. The stage of formal operations developed about the age of 16.5 years when using historical materials; even new active teaching styles could not accelerate the thinking processes of pupils aged 13-14 (Hallam, 1970, 1975).

Other studies took Piaget's theory as the key to understanding children's school performance, a means of systematizing the types of thinking required by different *school subjects*. Peel opened the way to develop school curricula according to the epistemology of disciplines. For him, the essence of understanding in history was not to be found in lists of facts but in *forms of thought* like the ability to grasp cause and effect, a capacity to follow a sustained argument and a power to evaluate.

Peel distinguished between 'describer thinking', which involves the relating of events without reference to experience and ideas previously acquired, and 'explainer thinking',

which needs the envisaging of independent ideas to which the details of the event or action are referred. These two ways of thinking might have their correlates with the Piagetian last stages in cognitive development, concrete operations and formal operations. Peel indicated that between 13 and 15 years, children acquired more mature modes of thinking, a development from descriptive thinking to the beginnings of genuine explanation; but this only appeared, according to Peel, in older adolescents (16-18 years), thus corroborating Hallam's pessimistic views about pupils' achievement in history (Peel, 1967).

These negative conclusions reached by Hallam and other researchers who had accepted the age-stage related general model of thinking elaborated by Piaget, had at first a very depressing effect (Booth, 1994). If second-order concepts and substantive concepts which form the nature of historical explanation and understanding could not be apprehended by most pupils under 16, as a consequence of their immature level of thought, history could not be effectively taught in the compulsory years of education. Then what justification could there be for its inclusion in the school curriculum?

Interested in the unique nature of historical thinking, some authors argued for a new framework for research: an open-ended analysis not based on the formal operational thinking modeled by Piaget, but on history's particular structure. Booth elaborated his study of the development of adolescent pupils' historical thinking specifying four areas of research: use of evidence, substantive concepts, attitudes towards history and the nature of pupils' historical thought. Results showed that 71% of subjects (14-16 years) were able to use imaginative synthesis and to make inferences. In Booth's view, it was impossible to assimilate such historical thinking to rigid stages defined by hypothetical-deductive thought structures. *Inductive* and *adductive* thoughts, characteristic of historical cognition, could be attained at an abstract level by a higher proportion of 14-16 year olds (Booth, 1980, 1987).

Dickinson and Lee, without totally rejecting Piaget, as Booth did, also suggested that history may have a distinctive character, different from that of science (Dickinson and Lee, 1978). The subject matter of history is abstract; it cannot be apprehended physically. The questions historians ask are not aimed to discover regularities in natural phenomena, because the human past is made of particularities. Besides, another essential feature of history is its incomplete evidence; in history, an experiment that provides all the evidence required is not possible. Then the problems of empirical research on thinking in history were very different from those of physical sciences with which Piaget originally had worked. It is also noticeable that this research was the first work on pupils' second-order ideas from an epistemological, history-specific, non-Piagetian standpoint.

These criticisms should not diminish the value of the studies in the Piagetian tradition for the investigation of pupils' conceptual development. As Wineburg notes:



Their efforts reminded researchers that the best indication of historical reasoning was not children's selection of a right answer, the mere repetition of learnt facts, but the nature of children's reasoning, their ability to connect ideas and the justifications they offered for their conclusions (Wineburg, 1996, 428).

### 1.2.2. The model of the *new history*

Partially rejecting the Piagetian framework of research, British researchers looked for a more explicit view both of the nature of history as distinctive of other subject matter domains, and of children's historical understanding. New approaches to history education developed in the 1970s and 1980s had come to be referred to as the *new history*. The key ideas of this movement placed the debate about the epistemology of the subject matter at the centre of history teaching and learning.

#### 1.2.2.1. Philosophical bases

There are two authors who particularly contributed to define the position of school history in relation to the academic discipline and to students' understanding.

Hirst provided a useful theory to justify the subject matter approach to educational research, giving school subjects a philosophical basis. These subjects are seen as *forms of knowledge*, which exhibited four main features: 1) a body of key concepts and ideas; 2) a logical structure, or ways of relating these concepts; 3) characteristic ways of establishing warrant for truth claims (e.g., historians' appeal to evidence); 4) particular methods of enquiry and procedures (Hirst, 1965).

Rogers connected this theory to history learning. To him, traditional history instruction had constituted the transmission of a body of information, not a form of knowledge. Following Hirst, he distinguished three basic features of knowledge: the *conceptual* ('know what'), the *propositional* ('know that') and the *procedural* ('know how') character of knowledge (Rogers, 1979).

The *conceptual* character comprises *substantive concepts*, which are, in many cases, not distinct from general human experience, and *second-order concepts*, such as 'objectivity', 'causation' or 'empathy', which are those related to historical discourse.

The *propositional* character is more distinctive: history is narrative, explanatory and interpretative. History tells stories out of the events of the past; the different degree of significance of those events makes the historian's task necessarily selective and, therefore, explanatory. As the events of the past can solely be induced from its traces, those sources must be located, to achieve a valid interpretation, within a 'contextual frame of reference'.

The *procedural* criterion means that pupils may --and must-- be introduced to source-based work, learning to operate the procedures specific to history. The relationship between particulars and context should be considered in the teaching of 'the past as a frame of reference'.

Rogers' thoughts directly connect to Bruner's theory of instruction. Basic ideas structured by conceptual, propositional and procedural components should be the main content of the curriculum. The curriculum itself should be progressively communicated to pupils by spiralling, turning back on itself at higher levels.

#### **1.2.2.2. Empirical approaches**

The most comprehensive model of an empirical approach to teaching on the basis of the *new history* was the *Schools Council History 13-16 Project* (SCHP), in which an important number of British secondary schools participated from the mid 1970s. By the advent of the History National Curriculum (1991), that participation had risen to more than 30%.

SCHP questioned the Piagetian models that concluded that history demanded levels of formal operational thinking which pupils could not achieve below 16 years of age. Project founders argued that traditional history education could lead students to possess copious amounts of historical information, while having no idea where this information came from. Nonetheless, they could reach higher levels of understanding if history was conceived as a distinctive form of knowledge (see Hirst above), and its curriculum structured around the nature of historical enquiry and historical explanation, not merely on factual knowledge.

The Project aimed at educational outcomes, which included the teaching, learning and assessment of historical concepts, procedures and attitudes. In the syllabus, they were described as *ideas*, or second-order concepts (evidence, change/continuity, causation/motivation, anachronism); *abilities*, or procedures (analysis, judgement and empathy); and *attitudes*, such as experience and interest in the human past (School Council History 13-16 Project, 1976). The Project had a strong impact upon pupils' historical understanding. In a comparison of the performance of approximately 500 SCHP pupils with 500 control pupils who were studying history in a conventional way, the former

consistently outperformed the latter in their understanding of key concepts such as change, causation and development (Shemilt, 1980).

Despite criticisms (Farmer & Knight, 1995), the picture emerging from the SCHP's evaluation seemed to support the idea that adolescents could be taught to understand history as a sophisticated form of knowledge different from other forms in the school curriculum. For many educationists now a new approach to teaching and learning, based on the *conceptual structure of history* and on the historian's methods of enquiry, was required. Educational researchers, then, had to turn to the conceptual analysis of philosophers about the epistemology of history, and to the ideas teachers and students hold about particular historical concepts, especially those which conferred on history its distinctiveness, second-order or organizing concepts.

In his work following this line of conceptual reasoning, Shemilt insisted on the explicit teaching of second order concepts in school history. In Shemilt's view, *second-order concepts* are the object of understanding; *skills* are the mechanisms of that understanding, whereas *substantive concepts* are the medium within which pupils' historical understanding can be developed. Through written tests and interviews, Shemilt tried to identify some of those conceptions. His aim, like the earlier work of Dickinson and Lee (1978), was to investigate the substance of students' ideas themselves. Hallam's aims (see above) had been to elucidate the formal properties underlying those ideas.

Shemilt studied adolescents' constructions of different second order concepts, such as *evidence* (Shemilt, 1987), *change* (Shemilt, 1983), *empathy* (Shemilt, 1984) and *cause* (Shemilt, 1980), based on samples of pupils from the SCHP and control groups. He advanced the notion of broad, decontextualized cognitive understandings in history that developed in a generally hierarchical and progressive manner.

For instance, Shemilt approximated four *levels of progression* in pupils' understanding of *historical causation*. These are not directly referred to Piagetian levels, but to the specific development of the concepts adolescents deploy when facing historical material. At *level 1*, historical narrative is typically seen as lacking inner logic; a cause is simply what went before: 'post hoc ergo propter hoc'. At *level 2*, historical narrative has a deterministic and inevitable inner logic: "Man cannot change history; it just happens". At *level 3*, inner logic is not detachable from the story itself; it is cumulative or progressive; pupils realize that causal factors interact with each other, and that the narrative is a selective commentary of events. At *level 4*, historical sense is reached: 'influences' and 'causes' are distinguished; events and causes cannot be dissociated from their specific contexts.

Shemilt acknowledged that it was impossible for children to appreciate the significance of what they are taught if they had difficulty in making sense of the 'story' in which events are located, if they lack the 'historical sense'. That is why a change in teaching methods and in

curriculum formulation was needed. According to Shemilt, the history curriculum should be spiralled around organizing concepts, and the ways students understand those should be investigated through research.

### 1.2.3. Research in second-order ideas and progression

The shift from the study of formal thinking to the investigation of second-order ideas has informed the best empirically grounded research on historical learning that has been carried out in the last two decades and is currently in progress.

Conceptual growth and the growth of reasoning have long been active topics in educational research. Since the 1980s, studies have emphasized that students' conceptual understanding in a subject matter provides a better guide for the organization of curricula and teaching than does the stage they have reached in developing their general operational abilities in reasoning (Resnick et al., 1996). Although the great majority of studies of this kind have focused on physical sciences and mathematics, in the last decade history and social sciences have increasingly been the objects of research in conceptual development.

Traditionally, progression in school history used to be measured in terms of *breadth* and *extent* dimensions, which described the total amount of knowledge a pupil had about the subject matter (Adey, 1997). This notion treats knowledge as collection/recollection of information, rather than as a web of understanding. From this perspective, history is considered as a body of established 'facts' and substantive content is assessed in an aggregative, rather than progressive, way. From the study of students' conceptual understanding, a third dimension is added to the model that has been proposed above: that of *conceptual complexity*, which is articulated from psychological and epistemological foundations. This dimension

holds the key to a true hierarchical notion of progression [... and it is] rooted in the intrinsic difficulty of the subject matter, and in the development of processing capability in children, along which progress can be measured unambiguously (Adey, 1997, 377).

Therefore, empirical studies should be further developed to construct *hierarchies of conceptual complexity*, which may account for the development of historical understanding. The elaboration of those hierarchies is not without problems (maybe the word 'unambiguously' quoted above is somewhat ambitious), particularly in the area of

history. A fundamental one is to *select the concepts that are distinctive to (or at least central in) history*.

In early research, there was an interest in *substantive* historical concepts, those which directly refer to the description, explanation and interpretation of events and situations, such as *king, revolution, church, castle, imperialism* (Stones, 1965; Peel, 1967; Hallam, 1975). The difficulty is that concepts of this kind are, in general, everyday practical notions in which the specifically 'historical' content is provided only by particular contexts. Our concept of democracy, for instance, cannot be extrapolated to that of Ancient Greece. To gain generalizability, other studies inscribed substantive concepts into the global evolution of social knowledge; thus, an anecdotal or personal notion of 'king' would give way to the abstract concept of 'monarchy' (Delval, 1988). But such concepts are still detached from historical contexts.

Besides, the investigation of progression grounded in substantive concepts proved difficult. To some extent, it may be possible to think in terms of progression in substantive concepts. For instance, the *Chata* Project, in its research of causal explanation, could detect the conceptual development of the notion of 'Empire' as something that ends on a particular day, to something that is complex and must change, even end, over time (Lee et al., 1996b). But, as teaching practice has shown, assessing substantive knowledge becomes very hard, except by accumulation; on what grounds, for instance, can it be suggested that 'the battle of Hastings' is an easier fact --or a more sophisticated concept-- than 'the Spanish Armada'? (Farmer & Knight, 1995).

A question, then, was pending: can history offer a 'pure' form of conceptual complexity, described in terms of levels that are content-free?

The need to answer that question and to overcome some of the obstacles named above are some of the reasons why a shift to an emphasis on structural or *second-order* concepts was made (Dickinson & Lee, 1978; Shemilt, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1987; Ashby & Lee, 1987, 1998; Lee, Dickinson & Ashby, 1996a, 1996b; Lee, 1996, 1997; Cooper, 1997; Lee & Ashby, 1998). *Cause, reason, empathy, time, continuity and change, relevance and significance*, are 'organizing' concepts of the discipline; they act as the medium to apprehend history's internal logic. To reach a sophisticated historical understanding, substantive content should be shaped by second-order concepts and historical procedures. Students tend to hold certain tacit ideas which facilitate or hinder their historical understanding; the knowledge of the ideas pupils have about organizing concepts, and the subsequent construction by researchers of an underlying hierarchy, are means to approach students' reasoning development in history. In this way, it is possible to delineate patterns of progression, or hierarchies of conceptual complexity in history learning, which are applicable to all kinds of content (Lee, Dickinson & Ashby, 1996b).

Seminal British research in children's learning of second-order concepts developed fruitful lines of inquiry for the construction of workable patterns of progression in history. Studies carried out by Lee, Ashby and Dickinson demonstrated the capacity of young/less able people to come to terms with the strangeness of the past, provided adequate tasks and sufficient time are given. For instance, on the basis of pupils' ideas about *empathy* and *rational explanation*, these researchers constructed a set of five categories for the development of the idea of empathy: *the 'divi' past*; *generalized stereotypes*; *everyday empathy*; *restricted historical empathy*; *contextual historical empathy*. The authors implied that understanding is not an all-or-nothing achievement; it is not something that teachers ought to wait for, as cognitive psychologists often suggested, but something that teachers should help develop. Flexibility of teaching methods allows teachers to discover how pupils see things and how they operate through different conceptual levels (Ashby & Lee, 1987).

Drawing on that previous research, which has already developed valuable patterns of progression in historical understanding<sup>1</sup>, and on an analysis of the domain itself, this project intends to obtain new empirical findings that can, in turn, feed back into the development of further and more refined models of progression. Ultimately, it is hoped that these models will be used to inform and enrich classroom practice.

### 1.3. History research in students' ideas: North America and Spain

Notwithstanding the pioneer character of British research in the field, during the last decade an increased interest in history teaching and learning has been developed among some academic groups in other countries, especially among educational psychologists. In this section particular attention will be paid to two areas: North America and Spain; the first because of the recent efflorescence of studies in a broad range of aspects with some relevance for this project; the second to set out a referential context for this kind of work, which is a comparative study between England and Spain.

In North America, except for a brief period in the beginnings of the 20th century, when historians and psychologists invoked the question of historical understanding (Bell & McCollum, quoted in Wineburg, 1996), mainstream research in history learning, until the last recent years, had focused on testing factual knowledge, mainly to conclude the

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<sup>1</sup> Other examples of patterns of progression already constructed are: *evidence* (Lee et al., 1996b), *rational explanation* (Lee et al., 1997), *accounts* (Lee, 1997) and *provisional explanation* (Barca-Oliveira, 1996).

students' "shameful" ignorance of "basic facts" (Finn & Ravitch, 1987). However, after the coming of the "cognitive revolution" (Gardner, 1985), there was a dramatic change in the investigations of cognitive researchers and (some) historians, in part as a reaction to this factual knowledge approach to history (*Educational Psychologist*, 1994). Encouraged and drawing on British research, inquiries focused on the study of pupils' ideas in the transition from everyday or common sense notions to specific understandings in concrete disciplines, such as history and social sciences.

In Spain, the implementation of a reformed educative system in 1990 gave impetus to new approaches to didactics in each discipline and area of knowledge of the curriculum. In the field of history, research is conducted by educational and cognitive psychologists and teaching practitioners; only a very tiny minority of historians are in any way seriously interested in the relationship between academic and school history, and the problems these similarities or differences of approach arouse (Valdeón, 1988; Aróstegui, 1989; Fontana, 1994).

In both countries, investigations are addressing a multiplicity of historical topics, from children's historical misconceptions to the analysis of textbooks, from teachers' elaboration of instructional explanations to the comparative study of causal reasoning in experts and novices. According to Booth,

What characterizes their work is the meticulous and finely crafted explorations of particular classrooms and groups of students and teachers. All are reluctant to generalize; all stress the need for the interaction between knowledge and teaching strategy and the pre-eminently important role of the history teacher (Booth, 1996, 41).

Among the most valuable studies related to the present project are: 1) those which deal with students' learning of historical explanation and interpretation; 2) those with an emphasis on narrative and on causal explanation; and 3) those centered in questions around historical significance.

Halldén is interested in the character of history as explanatory and in pupils' notion of *historical explanation*. In the tradition of constructivism, he establishes a distinction between the conceptions pupils hold in an academic context and through which new information is filtered. 'Misconceptions', are incorrect ideas, but 'alternative frameworks' are sets of beliefs or expectations that students hold about the way social phenomena occur. For instance, are pupils aware of what it is that is to be explained? Teachers and students need to have "a shared line of reasoning"; if data are presented in a context not realized by the pupil, learning will be inefficient (Halldén, 1994a, 1994b, 1997).

Increasing attention is being paid to the question of *narrative* as a basic device for historical explanation at school and college. In these studies, the distance between an analytical-causal explanation and a narrativizing explanation is being reduced. The importance of narrative as explanatory in history, especially for young students, has been highlighted by Wineburg (Wineburg, 1996). In Spain, Rodrigo studies the usefulness of narrative in causal understanding, one of the main factors for story coherence, and then, for pupils' learning. She sees a progression from "narrative literacy", or understanding of stories, to "historical literacy", or critical interpretation (Rodrigo, 1994). Jacott & Carretero concluded as well that historical understanding in novices works mainly through narrative (Jacott & Carretero, 1995).

Some authors recognize an underlying progression from 'interpreting stories' to 'constructing explanations' and 'negotiating uncertainty surrounding events'. The lower stage is necessary to go beyond and reach the complexity of historical analysis. Perfetti, Britt et al. conceive understanding history as having a mental model, a temporal-causal model of historical events. The coherence of a story is established through causal connections, because these are what make the story memorable (Perfetti, Britt et al., 1994). There is here the assumption that to understand a story is to have a mental model that links a sequence of events by temporal-causal connections (Trabasso & Sperry, 1985).

Other authors, such as Carretero, Jacott and Limón, have studied the perception of causes in history, comparing groups of experts and novices, and adolescents and adults. They found that there is a general tendency in adolescent pupils and in non-experts of preferring intentionalist over structural causal explanations, regardless of the historical content of the studied event (Carretero, Jacott and Limón, 1995). In this matter, the *Chata* Project's results indicated that the matter might be more complicated than that: children converted intentions into causal explanations (Lee, Ashby & Dickinson, 1996c; Ashby, Lee & Dickinson, 1997).

### **1.3.1. Research in historical significance**

As shown in previous sections, early research on students' tacit understandings in history was centred in the ideas of empathy, evidence or causal explanation; they were studied in a relatively isolated way. Recent studies, stemming from these previous lines, have tended to confront those ideas as overarching concepts, such as evidence and enquiry, rational and causal explanation, or narrative discourse and accounts in history. They are establishing solid bases for the development of further research.



An overarching structural element in history, very relevant for students' understanding and still needing attention is *significance*, the notion that informs the present project<sup>2</sup>. The study of the notion of significance is a way to approach the question of interpretation, an alternative way to face the distinction between structural or causal explanations (analytical discourse) and intentional explanations of history (narrative discourse) (see Wertsch, 1998, 48). Here narrative is considered as inherent to history writing. Concentration on significance allows us to by-pass the duality intentional/causal explanation.

Historians explain when tracing connections between events, in a process of "colligation" (Walsh, 1961). The issue is how historians use documents not to establish discrete 'facts', but as evidence for establishing the larger patterns that connect them (Evans, 1997). It is the 'frame of reference' which particular facts or events need to become meaningful (Rogers, 1987).

The enquiry about students' ideas about historical significance can lead us to important implications for teaching and learning. Firstly, one of motivation: if there is no meaning in history, if they don't grasp what they are asked to know and understand, what is the use of studying it? Secondly, and no less important, that of thought development: how students' reasoning in this particular strand contributes to their general historical knowledge and understanding?

A distinction should be made between what might be called 'objective' and 'subjective' significance in history.

'Objective' significance is understood in the context of a historical narrative<sup>3</sup>. Events are selected and organized in the account according to specific criteria of relevance, and those criteria are objective, because they do not merely follow historians' personal interests, but they respond to the logic of the narrative (see Chapter 2).

Some researchers started from analysis of substantive content, not from focusing on second-order ideas. Beck & McKeown recorded systematic patterns in children's responses, and they studied why 5th to 8th graders failed to construct the significance of historical events (Beck & McKeown, 1994). Results showed that narrative structure may be powerful and textbooks should be better oriented toward developing coherent chains of events and promote productive interaction between reader and text.

However, in the 1990s, most of research on historical significance and education has followed the approach of students' motivation, or what can be called '*subjective significance*'. This is concerned with what is considered important for children and

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<sup>2</sup> A thorough study of significance as a philosophical and historical notion is developed in Chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> 'Objectivity' here refers to a notion that relies on criteria of comparison, not on our having access to a given past (Bevir, 1994).

adolescents themselves, as students, *what is significant at each age group and for different cultural groups*. Linked to this conception are questions of curriculum development such as to what extent, for instance, can an adaptation of history to school curriculum, following pupils' ideas about what is significant, be made?

In the USA and Canada, where this kind of research is being carried out, great concern has grown, in the last two decades, about the problems of eurocentrism, multiculturalism and ethnocentrism in general (Seixas, 1993, 1996, 1997; Levstik, 1997; Epstein, 1997; Barton, 1999). Seixas found that an event that is highly significant to one cultural group may be quite marginal in the story presented in the formal culture of schooling, or may be marginal to other cultural group (Seixas, 1996).

In the present study, both approaches to the concept are being addressed, attempting to deem them complementary. A 'subjective' approach is required if we aim at comparing two different cultures. But also an 'objective' focus, concerning the nature of history itself, is needed if we want to delineate patterns or levels of progression in students' understanding. The study of pupils' ideas about significance in history allows knowing more about what and how the connection past/ present works, and to what extent they believe that their present has been shaped by the past. Ultimately, the question is knowing more about students' ideas to help them make sense not only of events and episodes of history, but also to make sense of the 'story' in which those events and episodes are located. A key point may rest in Shemilt's advice to learners, teachers and researchers:

Students should not be taught that 'p' is important whereas 'q' is not as though these were facts. Rather *they should be taught to debate the significance of events according to specified criteria*. They may, for example, learn to differentiate between the immediate and the historical, or long-term, significance of events; to use and to apply the concepts of 'change' and 'development', 'trend' and 'turning point'; and to understand that the significance attributed to events varies according to the questions posed by the historian, and to the spatial and temporal contexts of the narrative within which those events are to be located (Shemilt, 1996, 260, emphasis added).

This research study investigated which of those ideas students can already use and develop and at what stages, and it aimed at providing teachers and educational practitioners more effective tools to promote them.

A preliminary picture of students' awareness of elements that determine significance has been presented by the Project *Chata* work on global accounts' differences (Lee & Ashby, 1998), based on stories offering different tone, time-scale and theme, and asking also for reasons why particular events may be described differently. That work provides a starting-

point for this more specific investigation and also suggests methodologies for approaching students' ideas about alternative accounts. The present work goes beyond the Chata research in closely targeting the notion of significance, and in comparing, for the first time, students' understandings in two countries.

## **1.4. Educational context: England and Spain**

Once the academic context from which this research project stems has been reviewed, the next step will be to outline the educational structures that supports it, and build bridges between theory and practice.

### **1.4.1. Cultural comparison: European research**

This study belongs to a tradition of cross-cultural investigations in a European context. The European Union is searching for more coherent curricula within their members' educational systems. One of the latest and most interesting attempts in this thread has been the *Youth and History Project*, a large-scale quantitative study which involves around 32.000 adolescents (14-15 years of age) in 27 countries in Europe. It focuses on "historical consciousness and political attitudes among adolescents" (Angvik & von Borries, 1997). The hub of this comparison lies in researching national contrasts and European similarities, but the main problem is that they have been working with very large numbers of constructs (or categories generated from the data), and sometimes the results may seem rather puzzling: "The phenomenon *historical consciousness* is much more complicated and the relation of interpretations to *political attitudes* much more uncertain than could have been thought" (Angvik & von Borries, 1997, vol. 1, 207). Analysis of national data is still being carried out; thus some of the results originated from the comparative study are very tentative.

Another research line intends to gather relevant data that could be used by history educators in the promotion of the *European dimension* in schools. It has been developed quite recently in England (Shennan, 1995; Bell, 1995; Convery et al., 1997).

But small-scale comparative studies, based in qualitative data, such as the one described here, are also key contributions to the provision of more homogeneous design of history curricula across European countries, specially with regard to the question of historical understanding, and they can be more directly applicable to the educational process.

### 1.4.2. Educational systems: England and Spain

The interest of a comparison between students from England and Spain is explained because the reformist movements that led to the implementation of new curricula in these two countries developed in part as a consequence of a common deeper reflection on the importance of educational research. The changes in teaching and learning have followed parallel pathways in both countries, though much research in history education in the last three decades was pioneered in Britain.

Some of that research has inspired and substantiated the basic lines of development of *reformed curricula* in the two countries: the *National Curriculum* (NC), set up in England since 1988, and the *Law for the General Organization of the Educational System* (LOGSE), established in Spain since 1990 (see Table 1.1).

#### 1.4.2.1. England

In England, the curriculum for History has been implemented in different stages, following several reforms. One of the aims of the NC was to have a more centralized and controlled curriculum for compulsory education in all schools.

The first *History NC* was published in 1991 (DES, 1991), and it developed most of the ideas of former official documents, particularly the Final Report originating from the History Working Group (DES, 1990), with its emphasis on historical understanding and second-order concepts for assessment and teaching objectives.

Attainment in history was to be assessed against three 'attainment targets' ('knowledge and understanding'; 'interpretations'; and 'use of sources'); each one had ten hierarchical 'statements of attainment' against which the pupils' progress could be measured. This structure was revised later on (Dearing, 1993), and statements of attainment were replaced by 'level descriptors', based upon only one attainment target ('history'). These levels are intended to give an impressionistic description of the progression made by the students in

five 'key elements' ('chronology', 'range and depth of historical knowledge and understanding'; 'interpretations of history'; historical enquiry' and 'organization and communication'). As Booth stated,

The nine level descriptors are such a rag-bag of decontextualized skills, concepts and knowledge that it will be impossible to use them as anything more than the broadest, most general of profiles against which to determine the level of a student's performance (Booth, 1996, 47).

After that amendment, in terms of progression, the HNC may indeed have gone a step backwards, but still it must be considered as an advance for history as a discipline, in the sense that it is recognized as a form of knowledge, not simply as a collection of information, and its place is assured in compulsory school (although only from 11 to 14 now) as a distinct subject. New revisions scheduled recently stated that "education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in school" needed to be incorporated in the history curriculum (QCA, 1999), renovating widespread debates about what the aims of school history should be (Lee et al., 1992) and raising fears among authors in the field of further "slimming down" of the discipline in schools (Phillips, 1998); for some, the future of history teaching and learning is still uncertain.

#### **1.4.2.2. Spain**

In Spain, the LOGSE (MEC, 1990) made three main modifications to the former educational system. First, it extended compulsory education up to 16 (it was formerly up to 14). Second, it reorganized the structure of educational levels, creating a new secondary compulsory education (ESO, 12-16) and secondary non-compulsory (Bachillerato, 16-18). Third, an open and flexible curriculum replaced a former centralized and very content-detailed one (in this last case, English and Spanish tendencies would diverge).

But again, subsequent revisions of the general law, shaped as *Decretos*, or new official documents for each subject, tended to delimit the prescribed content (MEC, 1991, 1992), particularly in history, whereas basic questions such as a better balance between knowledge and understanding, or a more adequate assessment system, remain problematic.

Besides, history is taught as a distinctive subject only during the Bachillerato (16-18). In the compulsory years, history is integrated within areas of knowledge. At primary level (6-12), it is called 'Knowledge of the Natural and Social Environment'; at secondary level (12-16), it is taught as 'Social Sciences, Geography and History'. This is an important feature to have in mind when accomplishing a comparative study.

**TABLE 1.1.** English and Spanish educational systems

GRADE (ENGLISH)		AGE	GRADE (SPANISH)	
Key Stage 1	Year 1	5-6		
	Year 2	6-7	1º	Educación Primaria
Key Stage 2	Year 3	7-8	2º	
	Year 4	8-9	3º	
	Year 5	9-10	4º	
	Year 6	10-11	5º	
Key Stage 3	Year 7	11-12	6º	Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO)
	Year 8	12-13	1º	
	Year 9	13-14	2º	
Key Stage 4	Year 10	14-15	3º	
	Year 11	15-16	4º	
A - Levels	Year 12	16-17	1º	Bachillerato
	Year 13	17-18	2º	

#### 1.4.2.3. *Significance in the History Curriculum*

Since the implementation of a new version of the National Curriculum in England, in January 1995, the study of significance as a structural concept gained a direct relevance for teaching and learning history. Amongst the Key Elements for Key Stage 3 (11-14), number 2 *d* reads:

to assess the significance of the main events, people and changes studied  
(DFE, 1995)

Haydn qualifies it as "one of the most challenging, though welcome, features of the Key Elements", but warns towards possible problems. According to him, pupils lack the widespread knowledge and the abstract levels of thinking which are needed to achieve this requirement, which makes them have to know, for instance, the difference between the *results* of an event and its *significance* (Haydn et al., 1997; Hunt, 2000).

In older students, the acquisition of these ideas is not explicitly statutory, but there is no doubt that it is an implicit requirement for GCSE courses and A-Levels. The main problem, though, in the explicit or implicit inclusion of significance as a historical concept that must be assessed, is that there is no clue for progression in the indications of the NC, which go no further than the sentence quoted above (see chart in Haydn et al., 1997, 215).

The Spanish Curriculum makes very broad reference to the concept of significance both in the Compulsory Secondary Education (12-16) and in the Bachillerato (16-18). It is a general objective of the area 'Social Sciences, Geography and History' to contribute to the development of students' abilities to:

identify and analyze the interrelationships between political, economic and cultural facts that determine the historical experience of human societies, and the role that individuals, both men and women, play in them, assuming that these societies are the result of complex and long-term processes of change projecting into the future (MEC, 1991).

In the Bachillerato, the first general objective points out the abilities to:

explain... facts and events relevant to the history of the contemporary world, evaluating their significance in the historical process and their repercussions in the present (MEC, 1992).

But no indication of any measurement of progression is offered. Normative criteria for assessment are bound to concrete substantive knowledge, established in the "contenidos" or programmes of study.

### **1.4.3. Educational traditions. England and Spain**

Comparative educational research may contribute to deepen our understanding on the difficulties of learning from others. Students in England and Spain have been exposed, because of their relation to different *educational traditions*, to different *teaching practices*. Or this is, at least, a common assumption (McLean, 1995).

Conventionally, English tradition fosters a heuristic-empirical approach to knowledge, translated into a discovery-based enquiry, which facilitates active individual learning. Spanish tradition, closer to French, is embedded in a rationalist view of content, where capacities for logic, deduction and abstraction are predominant; in the encyclopedist approach, adequate transmission is more valued than trial-and-error discovery, and learning is generally based in the acquisition of substantive content.

Therefore, the teaching of history in England usually focuses on the use of sources and studies in depth, on discussion and a sense of uncertainty in the epistemological study of the discipline. In Spain, history teaching tends to be centred on content, coverage and chronology, and didactic methods are preferred to enquiry ones.

Those could work as starting hypotheses, but when two educational systems need to be compared, the danger lies in identifying, too simplistically, educational traditions to teaching practices. For instance, in a recent study about history teaching in England and Japan, classroom observations led to the conclusion that, contrary to what the researchers have predicted, that active learning in England would be predominant, in comparison to Japan, "English teaching styles were fairly didactic" (Booth et al., 1995). For this study as well, more complex similarities and differences emerged, than common assumptions might foresee, through the analysis of the data generated in pilot studies and the main sample.

In the design of this research, the question of the relationship between substantive content and second-order ideas, of knowledge and understanding, was always present, though such a clear-cut dichotomy continues to be object of controversy. The choice of second-order concepts --particularly historical significance-- was viewed as more suitable for a comparative approach. If research were grounded on substantive concepts, it would be more difficult to link the investigation done in different countries. However, once patterns of progression in both countries were constructed, it became clear that concepts such as historical significance in history are apprehended relatively independently of the events narrated, making practicable a more qualified comparison (see analysis in Chapters 6 and 7).

Recent --and still unresolved-- debates about the aims and role of history in the school curriculum, with especial attention to questions such as national/group identity and citizenship, in England, or the place of history in connection with the humanities and social sciences, in Spain, show common interests, though not always well-informed, that cannot be dismissed: namely the importance of history in education in the dichotomy national/European contexts. Research into historical understanding cannot but help redefine these controversies in more rational terms.



## 2. THE CONCEPT OF SIGNIFICANCE IN HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

### 2.0. Introduction

To understand students' ideas about how significance works in history, we must start with the generation of some main conceptual clusters, adapted from the philosophical debate and contrasted to students' responses, through which those ideas can be analyzed.

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, significance can be studied at two different levels: '*subjective*' significance, whose concern is the consideration of what is important for children and adolescents themselves, as students of history at each age group; and '*objective*' significance, which relates to the way(s) significance is attached to historical events in the context of historical accounts. The latter is our present matter, though some aspects of the former, especially those concerned with students' moral judgements, will be studied as well.

Objective significance is only understood in the flow of the historical narrative or, in more general terms, of an historical account. This means, as we will discuss later, that significance can be assessed by objective criteria that respond to the logic of the account. We will study the attachment of significance, and other relative terms, such as importance, relevance and meaning, in its explanatory and interpretative functions. This analysis will center on some particular concepts: *causal weighting*, *emplotment* and *point of view*.

Significance can also be assessed at two levels; the basic meaning, which corresponds to the historical fact, and the secondary meaning, which corresponds to historical interpretation. We have aimed to categorize these secondary meanings according to their possible attributions, specifying some of the different senses in which we speak of an occurrence as significant. This includes the assessment of the significance that an event had for its contemporaries. The debate about validity and truth in historical interpretations will be addressed in connection with significance through competing perspectives: *positivist*, *narrativist* and *moderate objectivist*.

The chapter will comprise four sections: 1) the nature of the concept 'significance'; 2) the construction of historical accounts in connection with significance; 3) criteria for validity and truth in relation to significance and historical accounts; and 4) attributions of significance in historical accounts.

## 2.1. The nature of historical significance

### 2.1.1. Significance and narrative

Before defining the nature of significance and the interplay between this concept and historical accounts, in connection with students' responses, we have to consider that *history is written*, that history only comes into existence when it is written down. The distinctive character of history writing is widely debated by historians and philosophers. The usual view was to consider narrative and analysis as alternative approaches to history writing (Elton, 1967; Mandelbaum, 1977). Contrary to that tradition, other views consider narrative not as an option, but as inherent to the knowledge of history. This second tradition includes authors such as Danto or Mink (Danto, 1985; Mink, 1987). Lately, recent trends in historiographical analysis, such as the narrativist philosophy of history and other perspectives influenced by post-structuralism and post-modernism, have contributed to enrich the discussion about narrative and history, in which our study of significance must be situated. Narrative is in itself a polysemic word, and its multiple layers of meaning may happen to be contradictory sometimes<sup>1</sup>.

Significance --this is not contentious-- can only be properly understood in the context of an account, or of a narrative. Furthermore, a historical narrative can only be recognized as such if significance is attached to the events that are narrated. There is the assumption that events present themselves to historians, either in a completely unstructured chaotic form before they are 'narrativized' (White, 1984), or in their temporal order, as a chronicle. According to the second view, history is not just a chronicle, a plain record of past events, but a 'significant' record, an account in which events are connected together. A third approach that takes a middle position has also been postulated: "a narrative is a purposeful account of continuous events" (Lemon, 1995, 42). All views agree, though, on the notion that history is concerned with assigning some meaning to the facts reported by chronicles (Danto, 1985), or, in other words, history is a 'significant' rather than a 'plain' narrative (Walsh, 1958). Historical narrative has a peculiar significance which transforms a succession of events into a meaningful sequence (Lemon, 1995).

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<sup>1</sup> In English literature, 'narrative' can be accompanied by alternative modifiers: plain or significant; descriptive or analytical; explanatory or interpretative; substantive or formal. Although we use 'narrative' when referring to these different senses, throughout our study we will tend to employ 'account' in a general sense (following Lee & Ashby, 1998), as a more neutral term, to avoid pre-empting meanings and to include history writing forms that have no narrative structure, such as descriptions of states of affairs.

Danto states that a historical narrative should satisfy these conditions:

- a) to report events which actually happened;
- b) to report them in chronological order <sup>2</sup>;
- c) to explain what happened;
- d) to establish connections between the events reported and to *attach some meaning* to them.

Crucial problems in history writing are not only those associated with gaps in the historical evidence, but those related to the selection and organization of the content of the narrative; it is not merely the amount of information we have, but also the way in which we use the information we do have that is important. We need to establish some criteria of relevance:

Any narrative is a structure imposed upon events, grouping some of them together with others, and ruling some out as lacking relevance... When one says: 'tell me the whole story and leave nothing out', one means: 'leave out nothing significant; whatever belongs in the story I want to be told of' (Danto, 1985, 132).

*Relevance* implies selecting which occurrences to include and exclude in constructing an account of an event; *significance* implies relating one event to another. Events are only *significant* in the light of some other events (with the exception, for almost all authors, of some 'intrinsically significant' events, such as the Holocaust). Something significant is always relative, it changes over time and depending on the perspective taken, but that does not mean that the event is not *objectively* 'significant' (Lemon, 1995) <sup>3</sup>.

So every narrative is concerned with attaching significance to its events, according to specific criteria of relevance that follow the narrative's own logic. It is not only the meaning of particular events, which interests the historian, but also the significance of those events within a certain narrative. What is essential here is that the significance of an event is hardly ever absolute, but relative: it depends on its relationship to other occurrences. For example, a concrete event like the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima could appear in traditional narratives as the end of the Second World War, whereas later revisionist accounts have portrayed it rather like the start of the Cold War.

But what is an event? A problem of terminology may arise here between *events* and *facts*, which has several implications when we study pupils' responses. The loose ways in which these words are used, not only by pupils, but also by teachers, historians and even philosophers, make us try to define them at this point. 'Event' is an occurrence in the past

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<sup>2</sup> This is arguable; chronological order is not a necessary condition for a historical narrative.

<sup>3</sup> See footnote on page 29.

that can be imaginarily (re) constructed as fact; its category is ontological: it depends on the existence of the past. 'Fact' is a more ambiguous notion, because it comprises the sense of both 'event' and 'statement about past events', and they already entail a meaning or an interpretation; they are traces of events used by the historian as evidence and, therefore, 'interpreted' for a particular question; facts are 'relevances' (Postan, 1971) or facets of the past which relate to the questions historians asks; their category is epistemological: facts are means to know about the reality. Events are ontologically stable<sup>4</sup>, but facts are epistemologically unstable, subject to revision and further interpretation. For instance, it is an 'established' event of the past that Christopher Columbus arrived to an island in the Caribbean Sea, which was a land unknown to Europeans, in 1492. Shortly after, European historians attached to that event the meaning of being the moment of the 'discovery of America', in a universal sense. This became a fact inscribed in a particular narrative: that of the Europeans' perspective. For the Native Americans, however, the named event had (has) not the significance of a 'discovery'. The problem is that for European historical culture the fact of the 'discovery' has been traditionally considered 'established', which means that it has been thought as real as the event of the arrival. This historiographical state of affairs has not been subject to wide revision until very recently (Zea, 1989).

In order to make sense of events in the past, in order to make them 'significant', historians select and organize the traces of those events --the evidence-- and elaborate historical facts in the context of a specific narrative. So every narrative must be concerned with finding the significance of events, through the selection of facts in a coherent account. The issue is how historians use sources not only to establish discrete facts, but also as evidence for establishing the larger patterns that connect them, the patterns of meaning which give coherence to the account. Three main concepts must be taken into consideration: causal weighting, linked to the relative importance of facts, and emplotment and point of view linked to interpretation. Significance in connection to the construction of historical accounts will be discussed in detail below.

### 2.1.2. Significance and meaning

*"Attaching some meaning to the events reported and explained"* was one of Danto's conditions for a historical narrative: we cannot give a description of the past unless we can

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<sup>4</sup> Strictly even events have to come under description, but the point is that some descriptions or sets of occurrences are not worth contesting and become conventional markers for events.

perceive the significance of the events we describe. And those events are interpreted in the course of the narrative.

For speculative philosophers of history, the question of *meaning* and significance in history led to matters such as how 'to reveal the underlying plot of history', or to explore the meaning and purpose of the whole historical process (Mink, 1978). It is connected to the ideas of 'Grand Narrative' (Megill, 1995), 'Great Story' (Berkhofer, 1995) or 'Universal History' (Mink, 1987). In this sense, history is conceived as the past as a conceptual whole and as an ideal narrative to which all particular histories refer. However, there is no rational system for the judgement of what is meaningful or meaningless in history, because

to demand the meaning of an event is to be prepared to accept some context within which the event is considered significant... There are wider and narrower contexts, but history as a whole is plainly the widest possible such context, and to ask the meaning of the *whole* of history is to deprive oneself of the contextual frame within which such requests are intelligible. For there is no context wider than the whole of history in which the whole of history can be located (Danto, 1985, 13).

We could summarize, then, that "wondering whether history has a meaning is quite like wondering whether life has one" (Hunter, 1991). And this project's goals are more modest. It is not about the meaning *of* history, but about meaning *in* history (Walsh, 1959). We aim to examine, rather than the ideas students have about the general meaning of history, what they think about 'what makes things meaningful in history'; if they consider an event to be meaningful when it has, for instance, important consequences or when lessons can be learned from it; whether students believe that events have an intrinsic meaning only or it is dependent on the context as well, or --if this second possibility is the case-- 'what criteria' we use to say whether 'this' is significant in history or not.

An analysis of significance in history has to distinguish between 'fact' and 'interpretation', in a similar way as we discussed when we defined concepts such as 'event' and 'fact'. Debates about the nature and mutual relationship of these concepts are open. For that reason we think important to start from a distinction between basic and secondary meanings (or facts and interpretations) to situate the notion of significance in history. To explain this difference, we will resort to McCullagh's analysis of the meaning of historical texts (McCullagh, 1998). He makes a first distinction between:

- 1) the *basic meaning* of a text, or the establishment of facts through explanation;
- 2) the *secondary meaning* of a text, or the subsequent interpretation that evaluates its significance.

In the establishment of the *basic meaning* of a text, historians adopt some kind of uniform criteria, such as consistency with the rules of language, resolution of ambiguities or coherence with the overall context. It includes the metaphorical or referential meaning, but it does not comprise the literal meaning, because the latter depends only on semantic and syntactic rules, not on knowledge of the context in which the text has been produced. And the basic meaning of a text is one whose ambiguities and uncertainties have been resolved by reference to its context. In its turn, this context can be referred to its linguistic features (the language 'spoken' at the time the text is issued) and to its historical features (the author's worldview and intentions). Historians must study all these characteristics to understand the basic meaning of a textualized event.

Once the basic meaning of a text is understood, then it is interpreted either by giving a general summary of the themes and arguments of the text (generalization) or by stating its function in the overall discussion or the whole specific narrative (identifying its illocutionary force). Interpretations are never ultimate, but they are not arbitrary either. The *secondary meaning(s)* of a text "are statements of its conventional significance, of what educated and well informed readers of the text would be conventionally justified in saying was its significance" (ibid., 144) <sup>5</sup>. A problem common to both methods of interpretation, by generalization or by reference to the function of the text, lies in the decision whether historians should make their evaluation in the contemporaries' terms or for today's readers. The usual choice is to present past ideas in the contemporaries' frameworks first, and then reflect on them from a 'modern' point of view. But not all analysts agree that this can be easily done, because in presenting past events a present theoretical framework is always built to make the interpretation possible.

It is generally admitted (McCullagh, 1998; Ankersmit, 1983; White, 1978) that historians usually agree about the basic meaning of texts, about the facts or individual statements of a narrative, yet they disagree about their overall significance. We can illustrate that dichotomy by a recent example, the interpretations of the German Empire of 1871 in modern German historiography (Lorenz, 1995). A consensus exists in the establishment of the primary meaning to a particular state of affairs (constructed by historians as a text): it is widely agreed that the German political culture was different, in the sense of less liberal and parliamentary, than that of other Western European systems, such as Britain or France. However, historians disagree about the significance given to different facts within the whole of their narratives. Some emphasize the weakness of political liberalism, while others stress the influence of Germany's geopolitical position. Prominence of some facts as more significant than others leads to a divergence of interpretations.

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<sup>5</sup> We should remember here, following Lorenz, that 'conventional' and 'arbitrary' can never be treated as identical in philosophical terms: to be possible, any rational pursuit in the construction of knowledge, any science, is grounded in conventions, *not* in arbitrary choices (Lorenz, 1998).

One of this study's aims is to analyze the subsequent interpretation of a text by the students, which is the notion which students commonly are confronted with when dealing with historical issues at school. Variety, and sometimes divergence, of interpretations in history is frequently seen as a problematic feature for its alleged objective construction of knowledge. Through inference from students' responses, we explore different levels of understanding about the issue of significance in its relationship to historical interpretations. Therefore, we do not argue in our research tasks, for example, about the meaning of particular events such as Alexander the Great's journey to the Siwa Oasis, or the influence of the Spanish Armada's defeat upon the war in Flanders. We are more interested in how historians interpret or assess the significance of Alexander's deeds or of the Armada's defeat as a whole, and how students understand this assessment and possible functions of significance in particular accounts.

## **2.2. The construction of historical accounts in connection with significance**

### **2.2.1. Explanation and interpretation in history**

From the specific senses of significance exposed above, we turn in this section to the process of allocation of significance in its *explanatory* and *interpretative* functions in historical accounts. During the construction of an historical narrative, at an analytic level, historians try first to establish and explain the facts (explanation) and to assign basic meanings to the events of the past (first level of interpretation). Then, or simultaneously, they are concerned with attaching some significance --or secondary meaning-- to the facts within an account (second level of interpretation).

*Explanation* operates by description and causal connection to answer questions of 'how' and 'why' events occurred; it is constrained by the questions it is designed to answer. *Interpretation* refers to the establishment of 'meaning' and 'import'. In Ritter's definition, interpretation is

the ensemble of procedures by which the historian, according to personal perspective, temperament, social conditioning, and conscious choice

imposes a pattern of meaning or significance on his/her subject (Ritter, 1986, 243).

And McCullagh defines interpretation as

one of several more or less justified accounts which can be given of a subject, which usually gives significance or meaning to its parts; *they involve a practical point of view* (McCullagh, 1998, 111; emphasis added).

The different degree of significance of historical events and processes justify the character of 'selectiveness' in history (Martin, 1989). Selection establishes what is important in history, in order to be explanatory and interpretative. But this selection is not fixed; there may be diverse selections of significant facts about the same event or situation, and all can be equally valid. Different criteria can be applied through distinct operations. *Weight of causes* modifies the explanatory function of significance (importance) in an historical account. *Emplotment* and *point of view* relate to meaning and interpretation.

### 2.2.2. Explanation by causal weighting

Historians' work involves the evaluation of the relative *importance* of factors or conditions for a subsequent event or series of events (*causal significance*). They evaluate one cause, in a sequence of events, as more important because it makes the event or state of affairs to be explained more probable than do its rivals. This judgement rests on a *counter-factual* argument: the assumption that we know what would have happened otherwise. Counter-factuals are usually justified by reference to some other real historical situation that, in some important respect, is similar to the possible situation reflected in the historical claim. In other words, historians look for a 'comparison situation' (Martin, 1989).

For instance, if we turn to the example of German historiography about the German Empire of 1871, some authors interpret the situation of weakness in German liberal bourgeoisie as one of the main causes to explain the rise of nazism to power in 1933; for them it is impossible to consider '1871' without '1933' (Lorenz, 1995). The explanation about the Empire of 1871 is elaborated in terms of consequences, of the causal significance that an event or process has on future events or processes. In this case, '1871' is given meaning in the light of '1933', and the weak German liberalism is postulated as the more important cause which links both events, with reference to the comparison situation of how



the process leading towards nazism could have been reversed if German liberalism had been stronger.

The need for contextualization arises here again. We have no single criterion of 'causal primacy' that obliges us to accept a particular alternative from competing hierarchies of causation; the concept of cause is not a unitary one. Historians' choice of certain elements as background conditions and of others as main causes does not depend on their inherent properties; the author's purposes and standpoint determine that choice by specific criteria of relevance to the account (Rigby, 1995).

In our study we analyze the ideas students have about significance and causal weighting through their answers to questions addressing their assessment of importance of particular events in different accounts. Our inquiry aims to address the following issues:

- 1) How far do students see the question of importance as a component of historical causal explanation or something that has to do with significance and meaning?<sup>6</sup>
- 2) Do they understand the notion of importance as a way of evaluating events as causes or consequences?
- 3) Do they see the notion of causal primacy as fixed?
- 4) How do students justify the attribution of importance to some facts or conditions?

### 2.2.3. Interpretation by emplotment

In an historical account, to grasp the significance of a sequence of events or processes is not the same as to explain why or how the particular occurrences took place. Narratives are explanatory at an epistemological level, but they are also interpretative at an aesthetic level, through the operation of '*emplotment*', or the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of 'plot structures' (White, 1978). By this, the historian shapes his/her facts into a "story of a particular kind" (that White refers to in terms of literary genres such as comedy, tragedy, satire, etc.). Meaning is grasped when the audience recognizes the kind of story that is being told (White, 1973). In a more general sense, *plot* is the logic and dynamic of narrative, which seeks to synthesize the discrepancy between the time of the past and the 'textualized' time of the written representation

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<sup>6</sup> Here we use 'importance' in two senses: a) specifically causal; and b) a wider notion as overlapping 'significance'.

(Berkhofer, 1995a), or to mediate between single events and a story taken as a whole (Ricoeur, 1979).

In that view, historical events cannot have an intrinsic significance; they are 'value neutral' and only acquire their significance when emplotted in a particular 'story': and "get their definition from their contribution to the development of a plot" (Ricoeur, *ibid.*, 178). On the other hand, historians select different kinds of facts because they have different stories to tell. Significance can be affected by the number of different ways that most historical sequences can be emplotted in. This extreme position (the absolute denial of intrinsic significance) arouses fierce debates among practicing historians and philosophers; how can we, for instance, dispute the intrinsic significance of events such as a civil war or the Holocaust?

The important point here is the way in which White analyzes the attribution of significance to past occurrences. White seeks to reconcile fiction and fact in the sense that historians employ the same techniques as novelists or play writers: the events are made into a story by the subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, variation of story parameters, such as tone and point of view, time-scale, aspect, etc. But, unlike the case of the novelist, historical narrative imposes a certain way of operating. Although historical events must contribute to the "development of a plot", they cannot be arbitrarily inserted into any 'story'. Consequently, the significance of an event depends on the story in which that event is told.

There is a second important sense, for our objectives, in which to understand 'emplotment', namely as linked to meaning and significance. By this operation, historical time is conceived as having direction, a feature that may encourage historians and their audiences to draw *lessons* 'from' history in the discourses they construct and read. It is a way to give meaning to history and offer a message to the present. For example, historians give cycles meaning by representing them as ups and downs rather than as mere phases. Historical accounts emplotted in terms of *progress* and *decline* are ways of interpreting history both as methodology and moral outlook; it is presumed in them not only that the past leads to the present --that history has a direction--, but also that the present is superior to the past or it has degenerated to our present eyes (Berkhofer, 1995a). We will study this sense of emplotment in connection to the attributions of significance, particularly with regard to pattern significance and significance for the present.

We will analyze the progression of students' understanding of emplotment as a key factor in the meaning and interpretation of historical accounts.

1) Do students employ the idea that the significance of an event may change because that event can be emplotted in different ways?

2) To what extent do students see historical events as having a direction? Do they think in terms of patterns of development, such as progress or decline, in historical accounts?

#### **2.2.4. Interpretation by point of view**

The notion of *point of view* is fundamental to define significance and interpretation in connection with students' responses. In any historical event or process, there are diverse layers of significance; the key question is how far students are aware of those layers, and how far they realize that even if the ideal thing would be to remain attentive to everything, the historian chooses *perspectives* or *points of view* and thus significance changes.

One of the most outstanding features in historiography is the variety of historians' descriptions, explanations and interpretations, and their changes over time. This feature is explained by the variety of 'cultures' (in the ethnographical sense) to which historians belong and their different and changing points of view. Besides, 'point of view' is bound to a notion of individual consciousness, that of the author, in which the conceptual (point) and the perceptual (view) terms are linked (Berkhofer, 1995b). Historical accounts are always written from a point of view: "unless the historian has a point of view, he can see nothing at all" (Collingwood, 1946, 108). This is a distinctive feature of history, because unlike the case of social sciences and physical sciences, which can also start from a point of view but usually remain within an agreed paradigm, in history conflicting paradigms/points of view may co-exist.

A debate exists between 'analytical' and 'narrativist' philosophers of history in the conception of 'point of view'. This debate opposes two different positions: the defence of an indirect correspondence between the past and historians' written works, and the stress on the linguistic character of historians' work, where a text (the account) refers to other texts (the evidence), not to the past itself. In the following sections, we will focus first on 'analytic' approaches to the idea of point of view and perspectivism; second, on 'narrativist' presentations; and, finally, our research questions will be formulated about the notion as a working tool for the analysis of students' responses.

##### **2.2.4.1. 'Analytic' approaches**

The notion of 'point of view' is implicit in Danto's explanation of the structure of historical narratives. He draws attention to the fact that significance can only be attached in

connection to subsequent events. Danto coins the notion of '*narrative sentences*' to explain this typical characteristic of historical texts: "they refer to at least two time-separated events though they only describe (are only about) the earliest event to which they refer" (Danto, 1985, 143). In narrative sentences such as, for instance, "The Thirty Year War began in 1618", or "Newton, the author of *Principia Mathematica*, was born in Woollethorpe", the significance of the date 1618 is given in view of the war that took place since then, and lasted for thirty years; and the consideration of Woollethorpe as a historical site originates in the importance of Newton's achievements years after his birth. According to Danto, an "Ideal Chronicler" who wrote a full description of events, that is, who stated absolutely everything that happened, in the instant it was happening, could not supplant the writing of history, because it logically could not include 'narrative sentences' as explained above. We can never witness the past "as it actually happened", in the Rankean sense, or we would have to forget our knowledge of subsequent occurrences. The significance of events is not immediate:

To be alive to the historical significance as they happen, one would have to know to which later events these will be related, in narrative sentences, by historians of the future (Danto, *ibid.*, 169).

Consequently, narrative sentences, in their connection between events that occurred at different times, are implicitly making reference to the *point of view* of the historian. For instance (coming to an example extracted from our tasks), to Victorian historians, the defeat of the Spanish Armada was seen as a turning-point in British history linked to the development of the British Empire, which attained its highest point in the second half of the 19th century. However, for those living in Elizabethan times, it was a naval victory whose reach they could not see.

The descriptions of central historical importance, in a sense, are those that contemporaries and eyewitnesses could not have had. But contemporaries' interpretations must also be taken into account to establish the significance of an event. The 'significant' works with the benefit of hindsight. It is only after the event when historians can apply the criteria for selection, to discriminate what is 'relevant' to the event. For our purposes, the differentiation between the contemporaries' and the historian's point of view, or contemporary and historical types of significance will be employed for the construction of levels of progression in pupils' responses (see Section 2.4). The decision to choose a specific point of view may be arbitrary, but the identification of what is significant within an event or process is not, because it obeys some particular criteria of relevance. Grasp of changes in perspective and their justification by means of criteria with regard to significance is one of the features that allows the establishment of a level-scale of pupils' historical understanding.

Another question deeply entangled with the notion of point of view is the extent to which *objectivity* can be presumed in historical accounts if perspectivism is recognized as a distinctive feature of the discipline. Significance can change depending on point-of-view attributions to historical accounts and it can be very sensitive to the perspectives of the historians. Different causes can affect the objectivity of historical accounts. Walsh groups these causes affecting objectivity in four categories (Walsh, 1961):

- 1) personal biases;
- 2) group prejudices (or social biases);
- 3) conflicting theories in causal weighting;
- 4) philosophical commitments (metaphysical and moral).

*Points of view*, as something absolutely required for historical studies (which refers to categories 3 and 4), must be distinguished from *biases* and *prejudices*, as "ways of holding beliefs" (categories 1 and 2) (Dray, 1978). This distinction, in relation to students' answers, will be crucial in our definition of levels of progression with regard to their understanding of what is significant in history according to a point of view. We will explore students' ideas about point of view and bias in historical narratives, and the degree to which they regard these as legitimate or illegitimate, avoidable or unavoidable.

#### 2.2.4.2. 'Narrativist' approaches

'Postmodernist' or 'narrativist' approaches (as opposed to 'modernist' or 'analytical') also explore the question of significance through the 'point of view' notion. We will focus here on some of the aspects discussed by two authors, Ankersmit and Berkhofer.

They start as well from acknowledging the inevitability for history writing of working from a particular position:

It is only by taking a point of view that historians can create their narratives or interpretations; the point of view provides the very way of 'seeing' the past as history (Ankersmit, 1983, 234).

Ankersmit summarizes his own views about narrative as the form of history writing in three main points:

- 1) there is a *narrative logic* that structures our knowledge of the past; since the past has no narrative structure, historical narratives are *autonomous*: they do not 'refer' to the past;
- 2) in historical narratives, the past is described in terms of entities that have a standing of their own; these entities, or theses of the past, comprise '*narrative substances*', which act as



interpretive frameworks where the events of the past obtain their meaning (for example, "the Renaissance", "the Industrial Revolution" or "the Cold War");

3) some '*point of view*' from which we are invited to see reality must be proposed in historical narratives (Ankersmit, 1983).

Yet 'point of view' in historical terms does not entail a subjective character in the sense, for instance, that novelists propose theirs. Historians construct and discuss points of view, but they do not *start* from certain points of view when describing the past; these are necessary to structure an historical narrative. For example, interpretations of social-economic aspects of the French Revolution can be called 'points of view' on that specific subject matter. Points of view are understood as interpretations of the past, as the form that narrative substances must take in rational discussion. Significance is attached, both to events in the narrative statements and to narrative substances, through the proposal of points of view in a narrative. That is why Ankersmit states that "points of view are conclusions rather than arguments... one does not argue *from* them but *for* them" (Ankersmit, 1983, 28). The point of view, then, expresses a preference for a specific selection of the statements that can be made on reality, and the totality of those statements constitute the *scope* of the narrative. The criterion for objectivity (in the sense of validity, not of absolute truth) in a narrative, is increasing the scope of the narrative, or its power to convey understanding of the past.

Berkhofer, instead of concentrating on the logic of the narrative, studies the question of the variety of interpretations from a different angle. He focuses on the problem of 'multivocality' in history, arising from the multiplicity of voices of the past (sources) and of different presents (historiography) that the historian has to integrate in his/her account: "historians confront obvious problems of voice and viewpoint each time they try to represent viewpoints and even voices of peoples of the past" (Berkhofer, 1995b, 174). He makes a first distinction between 'point of view' and 'voice' for this concern. '*Voice*' refers to 'who speaks in the text', whereas '*point of view*' refers to the question 'from what perspective does a voice speak'. These concepts apply to historical practice in two different ways: 1) in reading a historian's text; 2) in reading the historical sources themselves. A second distinction is made between *point of view* and *perspective*. The former is usually bound to a notion of individual consciousness; the latter aims to designate the supposedly faceless, omniscient narrator conventional to realism (both in history and in literature). Like novelists, historians need to decide what spatial and temporal perspective is to be adopted to produce the represented world presented in a narrative. 'Point of view' understands a represented world from the perspective of a belief system, ideology or conceptual framework.

For Berkhofer, all histories inevitably imply that notion, although it is, at the same time, this role that creates "the biases that confound historians' practice" (ibid., 166). The danger lies in defining a particular point of view (e.g., that of the privileged, white, middle-class male) as *reality*, rather than as a point of view itself. And when recent historians have criticized that position, problems do not end, because the new historians still write from a standpoint that appears to be single and ultimate, as the only mediator between the present and the past: "in the end, the historian's authority depends upon such a practice" (ibid., 183). But Berkhofer denies the conventions of objectivist realism, which pictures a represented world from a single synoptic viewpoint. The ideal of multivocality in history has not been reached, he says, but historians should experiment and become just another participant in the dialogue between voices and viewpoints.

We use the notions of 'emplotment' and 'point of view' to categorize students' ideas about how events of the past acquire their significance in an account. It is helpful to consider progression in terms of such questions as:

How far do students:

- 1) think historians hold a particular point of view in their accounts?
  - 2) perceive a point of view only as a bias that must be avoided?
  - 3) see historians as confronted with multiple voices of the past and different historical perspectives, besides the present's perspective?
  - 4) have a sense of audience for whom history stories are written?
  - 5) think that a 'point of view' in history writing is not only unavoidable, but also necessary?
- Do they think that this necessity arises from the inner consistency of the account?

### **2.3. Validity and truth in relation to significance and historical accounts**

Our last concern in understanding significance in historical accounts is the question of the consistency and competence of interpretations. Among the diversity of historical interpretations, among the different attributions of significance, and diverse degree in each attribution, how can we decide between different or even divergent accounts? Is the correspondence to 'what actually happened' the only criterion for assessing them? Or are there other criteria that must be born in mind, once we have studied the interdependence of

significance and narrative? Are all interpretations equally valid? On what grounds can we postulate the truth or falsity of an interpretation? Between a philosophy of history debating from positivist realism and relativist --sometimes skeptical-- post-modernism, 'normal' historical practice generally holds a qualified 'objectivist' position, which advocates for a standard of comparison not a given past, but various rational measures such as accuracy, comprehensiveness, or consistency.

Levels of progression will be built on students' perception of the problematic relationship between the past and its translation to written language, in the issue of the testing of interpretations.

In the following section, we outline the main conceptual approaches to the problem of the correspondence between history as the past and history as account. We also consider recent critiques of the narrativist philosophy of history --which denies the possibility of an objective reference to the past-- and the defence of history research and writing as a 'moderately objective' enterprise.

### **2.3.1. The alleged correspondence to the past**

For the realist or positivist position, history writing refers to a 'real' past that was once, but is no longer, present. Written histories are valid to the extent that they accurately correspond to this real past. In the 'correspondence theory', historical accounts refer to a past that "actually happened", and they are true insofar as they 'correspond' to a real past. It is assumed that true knowledge of the past can be revealed by careful enquiry: the past is 'reconstructed' in historical writing, where object (the events of the past) and subject (the historian) are independent (Ritter, 1986). Historians must try to 'discover' the *patterns of meaning* in the past events. Thus they select and organize the evidence according to its *intrinsic significance* (the event is important for its own sake) or its *historical significance* (the event is considered in the context of prior and subsequent events). This positivist model presupposes an emphasis on 'facts' and a dismissal of 'interpretation'. It is only in the 'facts', or the events selected as evidence by the historian, that have a direct reference to the real past, from which the historian extracts meaning: "historical study depends on discovering meaning without inventing" (Elton, 1991). That discovery depends on the facts, which "speak for themselves". The main aim of the historian's craft is, then, to discern the significance of historical facts in the past's own terms. Divergence between historical interpretations is mainly explained by gaps in the evidence or partisanship on the part of historians that must be avoided if a real historical knowledge is to be attained.



That notion is opposed by the idealist or relativist position, based on the truism that past events are inaccessible to present observation. History is actually "what the evidence obliges us to believe" (Collingwood, 1946). The 'historical past' is a construct of the historian's thought. Then history is not 'discovered', but 'constructed'. Objectivity as lack of partisanship and independence from a cognitive subject is not possible. If a correspondence to the past is rejected, a moderate position subscribes a 'coherence theory': statements about the past are true if they cohere with a system of other statements that we are prepared to accept (Oakeshott, 1933). Historical interpretations reflect the historian's own time and the historian's interests and values, and are not easily detachable from the 'facts'. It is historians who select and organize the evidence in accordance with their intentions when writing their accounts; then, the *patterns of meaning* developed to attach *significance* to historical facts and understand them are in the historians' minds, not in the facts themselves.

Positivist assumptions about the 'correspondence' between history writing and the past were more deeply challenged, since the 1960s, by intellectual movements such as structuralism and cultural criticism. The clear-cut distinction between history writing and its reference, the past, can no longer be sustained. Structuralists, following Saussure, establish the cardinal difference between *signifier* (the sound or appearance of the word), *signified* (the meaning or concept of the word), and the *referent* in the external world (Saussure, 1916). The signifier represents the signified, but it is not identical to it; all knowledge, as is expressed through language, is a representation, not the real thing. Language is constructed on the relationship of signifier to signified and of words to each other, not on the basis of a direct correspondence to reality. The question of language in literary criticism can be easily transferred to history. The claim that language provides no direct access to reality denounces the "fallacy of referentiality" (Foucault, quoted in Rabinow, 1991): history as writing (signifier) does not correspond to the referent (the past), but to a signified, or the meaning that historians and their accounts have established through narrative. Texts are constructed from other texts (Derrida, quoted in Wood, 1992), so the facts of history are just those constituted by historians. In many historians' view, this position entails an unbearable disregard of the once secure notion of the limits of evidence as the chief condition for the evaluation of historical interpretations.

The move towards the analysis of narrative as the distinctive feature of history writing will reach its climax since what has come to be known as the "linguistic turn"<sup>7</sup>, inscribed in the paradigms of post-structuralism and postmodernism. For them, the main interest has shifted to the question of historical writing, that is to say, the use of language in history and

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<sup>7</sup> According to Kellner, this trope alludes to Wittgenstein's reflection on the distinction between ordinary language and ideal philosophic language, which "foreshadows the division in the 1960s of narrativist from covering-law models of historical enquiry" (Kellner, 1995, 241).

the internal logic of historical narratives (Ankersmit, 1983). Narrative is not an option, but the distinctive form of history writing; the historian's language, in its narrative form, acts as a mediator which, at the same time, gives 'content' to the interpretation. Narrative is the only way that historians can give meaning to the past, or parts of the past, and go beyond the description of events in chronological order. The new positions of the debate started, then, from the recognition of the autonomy of historical writing with regard to the past itself, because, although historians can find traces of past events in the sources, no one can ever find the context or the totality against which the facts can become truly significant (White, 1978).

The most extreme postmodernists, following the "textuality of the past" (Derrida, in Wood, 1992), deny the distinction --blurred as well by the idealists-- between evidence and author. Historical narratives, in this view, encode facts and interpretations, which are not epistemologically distinguishable. There is no independence between subject (historians) and object (historical facts) in the narrative, which is studied only in linguistic terms as 'historical representation'. The implications for the notion of significance are very important: events are singled out because of the logic of the text, not on the basis of their 'intrinsic' or 'historical' significance; they are the "organizing units of historical discourse", but both historical facts and their interpretations are equally constructed by the historian (Jenkins, 1996).

### **2.3.2. Significance, validity and truth in historical accounts**

The discussion about the conception of significance and kindred notions of meaning, relative importance, emplotment and point of view also involves the idea of validity and truth in history (in connection with objectivity), which acts as one of the touchstones for the divide between analytic and narrativist (or 'modernist' and 'postmodernist') philosophers of history.

How do narrativist philosophers of history treat the question of validity and truth in historical accounts?

In the tradition of literary criticism, White has no hesitation in emphasizing the close relations between history and literature. He resolves that conceptual barrier by analyzing the common character of narratives as "verbal fictions, whose content is as much invented as found" (White, 1978, 42). To him, the criterion of validity by which historical accounts

might be assessed cannot depend on their 'facts', that correspond to reality, but on the integration of elements into a system whose terms are more or less credible when set against the overall coherence of the series. The point is to explore "the nature of the arrangements in the various layers of a text", or their emplotment (Berkhofer, 1995, 120). Historical narratives are true when they conform to particular conventions, the narrativists say, not when their data correspond to the evidence, as if these conventions had nothing to do with the idea of 'truth-tracking'.

Ankersmit makes a strict divide (as a reversal of the positivist conception of the correspondence between history and the past) between facts as *narrative statements* that correspond to reality, and interpretations or *narrative substances* that do not refer to past reality, but to the narrative text in which they play their role. Therefore, only the statements that constitute narratives can be true or false; narratives and narrative substances cannot. Along the same lines, neither 'meaning' nor 'point of view' as constructs employed by historians in their narratives can be empirically true or false; they are proposals, not things that refer to reality. For instance, the first half of the 15th century can be looked at as "a Renaissance of European culture" and/ or as "the waning of the Middle Ages"; but both points of view cannot be falsified by facts; there can be arguments to support each of them. Points of view express which of the aspects of reality should be considered or emphasized for an optimal understanding of the past. Yet there is a way to evaluate the validity --not the truth-- of narratives, and this is the criterion of *scope maximization*, which means that "the wider the scope of a narrative is, the more it exceeds the descriptive meaning of the narrative statements" (Ankersmit, 1983, 102), the one that adds up to the narratives already existing, or by which a better understanding of the past can be obtained.

What is the answer of moderate objectivists?

In his argument about perspectivism in history, Dray does not concede the relativization of truth, depicted in the interpretation of every historical judgement as subject to the qualification "from the so-and-so point of view", because this would mean "the abandonment of all claim to tell how the past really was". He prefers the alternative of *inter-perspectivism* that means that historians must recognize a plurality of perspectives and try to understand their interconnections. In this way, the 'possibility of agreement' is a chief criterion of an inquiry's being objective. Inter-perspectivism can be objective because "what the agreement will be about is not what the past was really like, but about how the past must be regarded from various points of view" (Dray, 1978, 282).

From a similar position, Rubinoff reminds us the idea of point of view as necessary for historical study, not as an argument for historical skepticism. Rubinoff explores, as Dray, the contention of "reconciliation of conflicting interpretations", to defend the possibility of

objective truth in perspectivism. History is written from a point of view which is value-laden as well as historically situated, but it can be objective as far as:

- 1) historians' pictures of the past are consistent with their underlying values and absolute presuppositions; and
- 2) their values are held in such a way as to permit the possibility of dialogue and criticism.

The objectivity of historical accounts may be evaluated if historians apply "the right standard of significance", which means that they are able to free themselves from personal and social biases and that they have a sense of direction in the selection and organization of the facts to illuminate new features of the past (Rubinoff, 1991).

McCullagh intends to counter-attack the objections to the possibility of reaching an objective understanding of the basic meaning and subsequent interpretation of texts by appealing, not to common criteria, but to specific criteria such as *scope* and *explanatory power*. Interpretations are *true* if they relate to things in the world in the ways we can perceive them, and *fair* if they provide a balanced representation that avoids distortion (McCullagh, 1998). It is generally accepted that culturally neutral views of the world are not possible, and that interpretational convergence does not exist. But this does not mean that truth in history is not possible, 'truth' in the sense that history accounts refer to things in the world, not just to the historians' ideas or concepts, and in the sense of search for the justification of the possibility of history as a way to progress in our understanding of the world (Martin, 1998).

Bevir also rejects the idea that objectivity in history is not possible on the grounds that we do not have access to a given past against which to judge rival theories. He relates the concept of objectivity to the concept of truth "by way of the nature of our being in the world", and he insists on the viability of objectivity and truth couched in terms of criteria of comparison between rival "webs of interpretation". These webs of interpretation are not simply self-referencing because our relationship with the world around us provides an empirical check (Bevir, 1994, helpfully used by Husbands, 1996).

In current historical practice, naive realism and the correspondence theory of truth are not literally followed, yet the historians' belief in the independence of the past from our historical constructions survives the philosophical criticisms of postmodernism. It cannot be denied that the emphasis on the textuality of history has led to new and fruitful insights. Historians now generally recognize, apart from the limits of evidence, their active role as authors, constrained by culture and language, in their own accounts. But at the same time, they do not renounce truth and fairness in their descriptions and interpretations (McCullagh, 1998), because history cannot be identified only with text, as literature is;

history is always about something outside the text --the real past (Lorenz, 1998)<sup>8</sup>. And, though they do not naively believe that their task is to 'discover' patterns of meaning that correspond to a real past, historians still recognize, on the one hand, an intrinsic significance to some events, and they are conscious, on the other hand, of the logic of the text, which assigns different degrees of importance to the events, or to the same event in different texts, according to specific criteria.

Stemming from the above discussion, our research questions with regard to issues of validity and truth in students' responses will be:

- 1) How far do students face the matter of validity and truth of interpretations as relevant to history at all?
- 2) Do they assess differing interpretations by appeal only to facts?
- 3) To what extent do they ponder that facts are not enough to prove interpretations? Do they distinguish criteria for testing facts and interpretations?

## 2.4. Attributions of significance

The nature of significance can be defined by reference to its *attributions* or sources, which must not be understood as categories into which occurrences are to be placed, but rather as statements about the relationship between occurrences (Ellis, 1992). It is an important problem, related to the connection between significance and meaning, to specify the different attributions of secondary meanings or possible senses in which we speak of an occurrence as significant: this will also operate as a test for students' reasoning. First we will turn to various typologies elaborated by different authors, after which ours will be charted.

Ellis stresses the idea that for an event to have historical significance it must stand in some sort of developmental relationship to other events; unconnected events that cannot be related to later developments may have intrinsic or contemporary significance, but they do not have historical significance. Thus he makes a distinction between these three types of significance:

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<sup>8</sup> Although we should admit, against the interpretation of empiricism, that we do not have pure experiences, and that the nature of a perception depends always on the perceiver (Bevir, 1994).

- a) *intrinsic* significance, in which the event is important for its own sake;
- b) *contemporary* significance, in which the event is seen as important by people at the time in the context of their perceptions, beliefs and view of the world;
- c) *historical* significance, in which the event is seen as important by historians, whose perceptions, beliefs and world view will differ from those of contemporaries, and who are able to use hindsight to place the event in the context of prior and subsequent developments. A secondary distinction can be made between *turning point* and *trend*, if different emphasis is placed either on change or on continuity within a pattern of development (Ellis, 1992).

The problem in this typology is that 'intrinsicity' is at a different level of categorization than the other two. Intrinsic significance may be assigned both from contemporaries' perspectives and from the perspective of the present. Moreover, we may draw further distinctions within the concept of historical significance, such as the different ways in which significance may function in the attribution of causes, or how it may work in the construction of a 'practical' past (based on myths rather than on established facts).

Lomas points out several criteria by which significance can be assigned to occurrences:

- a) they have a recognized relevance to people today;
- b) people at the time thought them important;
- c) they affected many people;
- d) the effects lasted a long time;
- e) those criteria are set against a general standard (Lomas, 1990).

All of them need to be qualified, though, and referred to a context. The importance of an event, for instance, can vary in degree (how many people were affected by it) or in nature (how it affected them). It depends also if we refer to the historical agents' view or we refer to background structures, to what time-scale, what particular values are involved to define 'a general standard', etc.

In his typology, Danto focuses on the types of significance that historians develop, with no reference to the contemporaries' perceptions. As we mentioned above (p. 48), he stresses the idea that significance can be attached to an event only in connection to subsequent events; therefore, historians can solely work with hindsight:

Events are continually re-described, and their significance re-evaluated in the light of later information. And because they have this information,

historians can say things that witnesses and contemporaries could not justifiably have said (Danto, 1985, 15).

In his analysis of the role of narrative in history writing he discusses the following attributions of significance:

- a) *pragmatic* significance: the historian selects events in order to make a moral point, e.g., Gibbon writes in a dismissive tone about the excesses of Byzantine rulers to point a contrast between them and the 'more enlightened' monarchs of his own time.
- b) *theoretical* significance: the selection/ emphasis of some events over others in connection to some general theory the historian seeks to establish or disestablish, e.g., the Commune of 1870 in Paris interpreted by Marxist historians within the general theory of class struggle.
- c) *consequential* significance: this is the typical use of the term in history writing: when historians say that an event has no significance, they do not mean that it has no consequences, but that it has no *important* ones. This sense is logically connected with an independent notion of *importance*, where the latter may depend on a number of different criteria. We say, for example, that as a consequence of the Persian Wars, the Athenians were able to develop along autonomous lines and to consolidate their cultural achievement. Danto emphasizes the essential character of this sense of significance relative to the very structure of the *narrative*: if an earlier event is not significant with regard to a later event in a story, it does not belong to that story.
- d) *revelatory* significance: this is referred to the gaps in the evidential record. As an example, Danto sets out the significance of Descartes' moving to Holland, because free thought was suppressed in France; it can be taken, then, that the situation in Holland was different in that matter. This can also be generally explained as the possibility that a set of events is significant to historians if, on the basis of them, they can reconstruct or infer the occurrence of some other set of events.

Our next step is to establish a working typology of significance according to its bases that we can apply in the empirical analysis. Our specific research question here aims at knowing to what extent students are aware of possible different (or complementary) forms that significance may take within a historical account, in the case that they see this concept as variable. We borrow and reconceptualize some of the senses, reported above, in which significance is 'classified' for the description of our own typology, and add some others. First, we consider *historical significance* as a whole, including in this concept the attributions that contemporaries may assign as well as historians' allocations. Second, the notion of 'intrinsicality' is considered for different attributions, not as a separate definition.

Third, the notion of 'importance' is embedded in two particular sources, significance as causal and significance for the present and the future. Hence, we study students' grasp of possible sources of significance according to the following types:

a) Significance for contemporaries

The significance of past actions, events or processes must in the first instance be understood in terms of their agents' own perceptions, not ours<sup>9</sup>. Before historians construct their own accounts, they must understand contemporaries' own constructions. We cannot forget Collingwood's appeal to "history as re-enactment of past experience" (Collingwood, 1946). Thus significance is linked to rational understanding, by which the explanation and interpretation of historical occurrences are seen in relation to the agents' intentions or 'rational' behaviour. But both senses (agents' and historians') should be explicitly distinguished in history writing, and this is not always the case. Our interest is to see if students are aware of these two different perspectives in the context of a narrative. It is also very important to take into account the limits of the agents' viewpoints in the construction of knowledge of the past. It is not always acknowledged by pupils that historians have an advantage over eyewitnesses (Barca-Oliveira, 1996): their hindsight gives them better possibilities for making sense of events than those of contemporaries, often distorted by unavoidable ignorance and confused by direct involvement.

In our empirical analysis, we try to detect whether students see the significance of an occurrence, in connection with the notion of importance (see footnote on page 45), only as intrinsic (the event is important for its own sake) or situated in an action-set. Moreover, we study students' justifications about possible different perceptions of an event as significant, depending on what agents are considered. For instance, in the case of the Spanish Armada, we observe whether they are attentive to different contemporaries' viewpoints, such as the English' and the Spanish', or if their own nationality prevents them from perceiving the others' side.

b) Causal significance

We prefer this denomination to Danto's 'consequential', though the idea of *consequence* is entangled in this source of significance. Our position is to study an event's significance because of its causal power. The significance of events is always correspondent to their encapsulation as facts, in part dependent upon later events, and therefore, also partly dependent upon future events. Events have different significance in different courses of

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<sup>9</sup> Except cases in which events were deliberately contextualized in an external way, e.g., long-term trends and processes.



events. So a single event can play a different role in different causal chains, or in different narratives. As we saw in Danto's discussion, this sense is connected with an independent notion of *importance*, and this may depend on a number of different criteria (theme, time-scale, space, evaluative tone) (Lee, 1997). The kind of meaning that an event has in a narrative is a matter of its significance with respect to subsequent events, often in terms of causation. The significance of an event may be measured in terms of the priority of various causes, or *causal weighting* (Martin, 1989), which means the evaluation of the event as cause of relative importance to a subsequent event, or consequence. This consideration of 'relative importance' refers to the situation of the event in an action-set, or as part of a pattern of change. In this aspect, significance is analyzed as having an explanatory function in the historical narrative (see p. 43), and also its possible interdependence with pattern significance (see below) in the broader context of interpretation.

In our research tasks, following the Project *Chata*'s categorization (Lee, 1997), different aspects of cause are included, categorized by theme (economic, social, political, etc.), by space (Europe, Spain, Holland, etc.) and by time-scale (long-term, short-term, immediate). The issue here is to understand students' ideas about significance, and in particular to discover if students assess the significance of an occurrence as relative to its consequences, and whether they distinguish the choice of aspect and time-scale as inherent to the logic of the narrative, to the author's own interests, etc. or they do not think in these terms at all. Levels of progression are designed from the grouping of pupils' answers to the question of the importance of a particular event in a given account.

### c) Pattern significance

Patterns of development are established in history writing by attaching significance to changes and by linking them together in a developmental, rather than a chronological account. In this feature the difference lies, as we discussed above, between a plain narrative (chronicle) and a significant narrative (history). The meaning of the attribution of significance as 'pattern' is not causal in any sense. It refers to the event as being part of a pattern of change, and it has to do with the distinction used in the School History Project and the Cambridge History Project (Ellis, 1992) between *turning point* and *trend* (see p. 58). A *trend* is a historically significant continuity embodying some degree of consistent change, whereas a *turning point* is a historically significant discontinuity in which the pace and direction of subsequent development is altered substantially. The latter only becomes apparent when we consider the significance of the change in the context of long-term processes. Because an event may have a variety of different significances, based on criteria of relevance, an event that appears to be a turning point in one account will not necessarily be that in another account.

In our tasks, we explore how far students differentiate between different attributions of pattern significance in two parallel accounts of the same occurrence.

#### d) Symbolic significance

This attribution is studied from two perspectives in this research: contemporary and historical. The idea of the symbolic significance of an occurrence from a contemporary perspective arises, for instance, in the English perception of the Armada's defeat as a divine sign (i.e. God was Protestant!). Sometimes, though, an event is given a significance beyond the limited importance granted by its contemporaries and its causal weight established by historians. It may be considered as having an enormous significance over a long period of time, as a milestone in the general course of events. In this case, we talk about 'symbolic' significance. In some cases, then, it can be related to pattern significance. It is also attached to the notion of 'collective memory', which is different from historians' history, and it appears mythic, deformed and anachronistic, but "it constitutes the lived reality of the never-completed relation between present and past" (Le Goff, 1992, 42).

This sense is closely connected to the notion of "pragmatic" significance. Historians --and not only them, but also other social scientists and politicians-- may apply the so-called *lessons of history*, often derived from myths useful to a policy or viewpoint adopted in the present. Related concepts are those of the 'practical past' (as opposed to the 'historical past', see Oakeshott, 1967) and 'collective' or 'selective memory', for which history is understood as a form of discourse whose purpose is the preservation of past events considered relevant to the group. Then one of the main objectives of historians' history is to give solid arguments in order to debunk myth. But it is by no means easy to attain that aim. As Hobsbawm reminds us,

Why do all regimes make their young study some history at school? Not to understand their society and how it changes, but to approve of it, to be proud of it, to be good citizens of the USA or Honduras or Iraq (Hobsbawm, 1997, 35)

This is a very important sense for the purposes of our comparative study, because questions of *national identity* and *sense of partisanship* are deeply entangled with students' ideas about what is significant in history. Another question that we will touch on in this domain is how far and in what ways the substantive myths about particular historical events actually affect students' notions of importance and significance. We also need to consider that pupils' judgements are generally influenced by the fact that a particular historical event belongs to their 'own' history, and they tend to represent their own national history in a different way to world history (Carretero et al., 1997).

e) Significance for the present and the future

In this sense, the connection works between past meaning, or significance for the contemporaries of the past event, and present significance. In historical accounts, the relationship past/present is unavoidable, because historians' interpretations of the significance of events and processes are shaped by the preoccupation of the present and from their present's perspective; and the nearer one approaches the present, the more likely is this to be the case. The so-often quoted statement by Croce: "all history is contemporary history" reminds us that historians are guided in their judgement as to what events were important or unimportant in the past by their present concerns. Yet if it is important not to overlook this feature, it is equally important not to exaggerate it, for it does not follow that it leads to deliberately biased work.

Thus this notion is also related to the concept of importance and causal weighting. It can be explained through terms such as influence, legacy and posterity, when the bond with the future is emphasized. The influence of an occurrence in the very long term, up to the present, can be analyzed in a pattern of development, in an action-set or it can be considered important for its own sake, as intrinsic. Possible relationships with symbolic significance are studied as well, particularly at the comparative level between nationalities.

As in the symbolic notion, linked to the study of historical significance for the present is the question of *moral judgement*, intertwined with students' ideas about the epistemology of history. Here then we follow the American tradition of research into significance as 'subjective', or what is meaningful in the past for the students' present (see Chapter 1, p. 29). Ultimately, the study of pupils' ideas about significance in history allows knowing more about what and how the connection past/present works, and to what extent they believe that their present has been shaped by the past.

From this working typology of the different senses in which significance can be understood, our first concern in constructing the conceptual frameworks within which students' responses are analyzed can be summarized in the following leading questions:

- 1) To what extent students see the significance of an event as fixed?
- 2) How far do students think that the events of the past acquire their significance only in the context of an account?

These will allow us to define progression in INTRINSICALITY / CONTEXTUALITY.

- 3) In the case that they see significance as variable, to what extent are they aware of the possible different attributions that may work within a historical account?

4) How far do they consider that the 'logic of the narrative' obeys different theories of causal weighting and different emphasis on a particular source of significance?

These will allow us to define progression in DISTINCTION OF ATTRIBUTIONS OF SIGNIFICANCE.

## 2.5. Significance: a definition

Significance in history must be understood in the context of an *historical account*. Conversely, a historical account can only be understood as such if some significance is attached to the events included in that account. Events are selected and organized in the account according to specific criteria of relevance through the operation of *emplotment*. Those criteria are objective, because they do not merely follow historians' personal interests, but they respond to the logic of the account.

Historical significance can be attributed at two levels: as basic meaning, which corresponds to the historical *fact* (and includes the condition of intrinsic significance), and as secondary meaning, which relates to the broader notion of historical *interpretation*. In this last case, significance is almost always a relative matter, because it implies relating one event to another, and because the relationships between events depend on the *point of view* or perspective that historians take to construct their accounts. The notion of point of view is understood as a distinctive and necessary feature of historical accounts.

The nature of significance is defined by reference to its *sources*, or *types*, which establish the relationship between events and processes in an account. The significance of any occurrence may change because historians select different points of view which spring from different sources. We consider here the following possible attributions of significance: *contemporary* (linked to rational understanding), *causal* (in connection with relative importance and causal explanation), *pattern*, *symbolic* and significance *for the present and the future*. The *validity* and *relative truth* of competing accounts can be tested by means of objective criteria of relevance emerging from different sources of significance.

### 3. METHODS AND MATERIALS. EXPLORATORY AND PILOT STUDIES

#### 3.0. Introduction

The research design of this study is cross-cultural and cross-sectional. As we said, it focuses on a comparative analysis of students' progression in the understanding of the concept of historical significance. The comparative approach works at two levels: first, in the relationship between two educational systems, those from England and Spain; second, in the comparison of cognitive development across three bands of age: 12-13, 14-15 and 16-17 years.

Since the general acceptance at school level that 'history is think, as well as remember', the investigation of progression or the development of students' understanding in the discipline of history has become unavoidable, if there is a prior interest in the construction of coherent curricula and assessment systems. This investigation centres on students' ideas, because only through the study of learning can teaching approaches be grounded on firm bases. In particular, research is constructed around the clusters of ideas students are likely to hold with reference to why and when something is selected as a significant event or process in history.

Methods followed in this study are mainly qualitative: the exploration of pupils' ideas works through 'non test-like' kinds of activities. Written tasks, both in open and closed questions are designed not to get a 'right' answer, but to delve into student's thinking about history. Interviews are intended to clarify, complement or deepen students' written answers, in order to obtain further in-depth data. However, the scale of our sample --144 students in the main study-- will also allow a quantitative analysis in some specific aspects, such as comparison of levels of progression by sex, age, grade and country, once patterns of progression have been delineated in the qualitative analysis. The goal is not so much to provide a foundation for making claims about general populations as to identify the range of responses that occur in a particular setting in two different countries.

In this study, comparative research in the field of students' ideas about history in two countries of the European Union is accomplished only in the sphere of learning; the influence of teaching can solely be accounted for in a speculative way. Nevertheless, the investigation of possible similarities and differences by country / educational system will

permit some conclusions that are generalizable for students' progression in historical understanding in different cultures.

This chapter sets out to do three things: first, to present the general methodological background of this project; second, to offer a description of the methods deployed in early empirical studies; and third, to consider some of the problems encountered in the several cycles of trials carried out for those preliminary studies.

### **3.1. General methodological issues**

Two different groups of methodological issues must be confronted to answer the research questions formulated in the general introduction, in the conceptual framework that has been defined in Chapter 2. First, we focus on some cognitive and epistemological problems that must be dealt with in an empirical study about students' ideas on historical second-order concepts and, more specifically, on significance and historical accounts. Second, we consider some cross-cultural problems that must be faced in a comparative study.

#### **3.1.1. Cognitive and epistemological issues**

In general terms, the investigation into students' reasoning from the point of view of second-order concepts requires an awareness of the way history works, especially in matters of significance and accounts. It is important to consider the distinctiveness of history. Certain ideas that can be inferred from pupils' responses relate to empirical knowledge, such as the ability to make generalizations or the use of systematic methods. Some others are common to any epistemological matter, for instance, the argument about knowledge as discovered or constructed, whose responses can be framed in opposed paradigms, either positivist or interpretive.

However, other particular ideas are most certainly related to specialized ways of thinking specific to historical knowledge, for example, the notion that history is subject to constant reinterpretation, or that historical accounts are not 'copies' of the past. Ideas of this type are not usually acquired spontaneously, but through explicit, though not always direct, teaching. Reformed statutory orders in England and in Spain have made these ideas shape

the history curriculum, and their explicit teaching is more widespread than it used to be, but still educational practices differ a great deal in both countries (see Chapter 1, section 1.4.2).

An added difficulty for research purposes is how to *disentangle* overarching concepts such as explanation or interpretation in relation to significance in history, concepts that are the object of endless debate amongst academics. Within the conceptual clusters defined in the previous chapter, we have isolated some of those organizing concepts to situate students' responses analytically and make possible the devising of stages of progression.

Narrowing our focus, throughout almost two years of research, work for pilot studies and for the final study was centred on the design and trial of appropriate targeted material. Specific tasks were devised to give students as wide opportunities as possible to show their tacit understandings in history, with reference to particular *second-order concepts*. Accomplishing this aim is not without obstacles, because in trying to avoid the risk of obtaining cryptic responses, that could be derived from young students' unfamiliarity when they tackle those philosophical concepts, further dangers may arise:

- 1) As discussed before, few questions from the tasks address second-order ideas directly; inferences are needed. That is why the research tasks have to deal as well with *substantive concepts*, those that refer to the 'content' of history. Students' responses allow the exploration of their understandings about, for instance, the explanation of an event from the agent's perspective, or their notions of multicausalism of events, but those understandings are inferred from explanations dealing with determined historical situations or events. This indirect approach risks imposing the researcher's theoretical constructs over the 'real' ideas of students. To limit the interpretation of responses by the researcher, two ways of triangulation were prepared: first, through different content (with the same kind of questions); second, through different approach, in written and oral work.
- 2) The gradual development of students' historical understanding must go hand in hand with the acquisition of knowledge of the historical context (Dickinson & Lee, 1978). For example, the more or less elaborated conception of the meaning(s) of an event or process ultimately depends, not only on pupils' cognitive maturation, but also on the extent and depth of their specific knowledge of the period.
- 3) The relationship between second and first-order concepts in history is by no means clear-cut. As recent research in Spain and USA has shown, they are mutually influenced (Carretero et al., 1995; McKeown & Beck, 1994). The already outmoded debate over 'knowledge versus skills' has always been spurious. Historical explanations and interpretations work through causal and intentional procedures as much as through factual and conceptual frameworks; in school history, both should be explicitly taught, to reach the best possible understanding (Domínguez, 1993; Domínguez & Pozo, 1994). But when

looking at participants' responses (in this study), it is not always clear how sophisticated their ideas of cause may be if, for instance, they lack the vocabulary for categorizations by aspect or time-scale.

4) Language is the necessary mediator of access to pupils' thinking, but to what extent is cognitive maturation linked to language competence? The combination of written and oral responses seek to diminish this problem, in an attempt to get access to students' ideas as genuinely as possible, especially among younger ones. Early analysis of year 8 answers showed --generally-- far richer arguments given in interviews than in written tasks. Oral interaction also allows non-formal language, but, for the researcher, checking that a particular student means what he/she appears to mean is still fraught with uncertainty. In the last resort, what is he/she prepared to assent to?

5) Further remarks should be noted here about the notion of progression, one of the concepts in terms of which this study is framed. One of its final objectives is, in the longer term, to provide better tools for assessment and classroom practice. The construction of levels of progression will allow the development of some bases for assessment. But researchers in the field have been aware of two distinct types of categorization with regard to 'levels': *assessment levels* and *construct levels* (Lee et al., 1996b). The formers are categories of achievements referred to a criterion reference hierarchy, previously established, which aims at measuring, usually, understanding or procedures. Construct levels refer to theoretical and empirical research of how students think; there are some loosely pre-determined criteria according to which responses can be allocated, but ultimately the hierarchy of construct levels is generated, if there is any, after the analysis of pupils' answers.

Besides, construct levels refer to "the natural history of adolescent ideas" (Shemilt, 1987), and may only work in the particular context of current educational practices. They do not refer to invariant stages in the growth of operational intelligence, in the Piagetian sense, because although students' ideas may form connected clusters which can be analyzed into a logical hierarchy, they are not static or fixed; they depend on the tackled content (if it is familiar or unfamiliar), on the previous knowledge students have and on their teaching and learning experiences. Nevertheless, recent and current studies in different countries (Domínguez, 1993; Barca-Oliveira, 1996; Ashby & Lee, 1998) are showing that, as Ashby and Lee predicted, "there are clear signs of convergence between the main strands of research in the area of second-order ideas" (Ashby & Lee, 1987).



### 3.1.2. Cross-cultural issues

'Comparison' is certainly an ambiguous term. The first questions that must be confronted when accomplishing a comparative study are *why compare* and *what the limits of the comparison are*.

In the first place, there is the general idea that 'comparison' is a universal method: there can be no understanding of any social science phenomena unless there is an element of comparison. Comparative educational researchers sustain the notion that it is only possible to develop a theory of education by examining the same, or similar, phenomena, in different settings (Watson, 1996).

Traditional research trends followed the 'cargo cult' or 'advocacy' line, that is to say, a kind of research that intended to transfer alleged goodness and advances from one educational system to another (Cowen, 1994), in the way Sadler addressed his famous question "How far can we learn anything of practical value from the study of foreign systems of education?" (Sadler, 1964). In other studies, this emphasis on 'practical return' has been overcome by a more global approach: "Comparative education begins when some complex, coherent and theoretically stateable understanding of the relationship between at least two societies and their educational systems has been formed" (Cowen, 1996, 153).

The present work rather identifies with the model which asks the same question in two places (Cowen, 1994); in this case, what commonalities and differences exist in the ideas students from England and Spain hold about history. It aims to obtain a 'thick description', in the ethnographic sense, which may allow us to see that 'our' problems --those of England or of Spain, in this case-- are not unique, but it does not seek in 'the other' (e.g., England) clarification for processes in 'the self' (e.g., Spain; again, in anthropological terms).

The focus is very limited: we are investigating a particular aspect of students' second-order ideas in history, and we are looking --directly, at least-- at tacit understandings, not at teaching practices. A very specific kind of population has been selected for the comparison: two mixed-ability groups of secondary level students from different schools in both countries. These are the *limits of the comparison* in which this study is framed. But at the same time, it tries to be aware of the educational contexts and different cultures where recent curricular developments have taken place. The main interest here is the extent to which similar patterns (at the level of age groups) occur in the development of ideas in rather different cultures such as England and Spain.

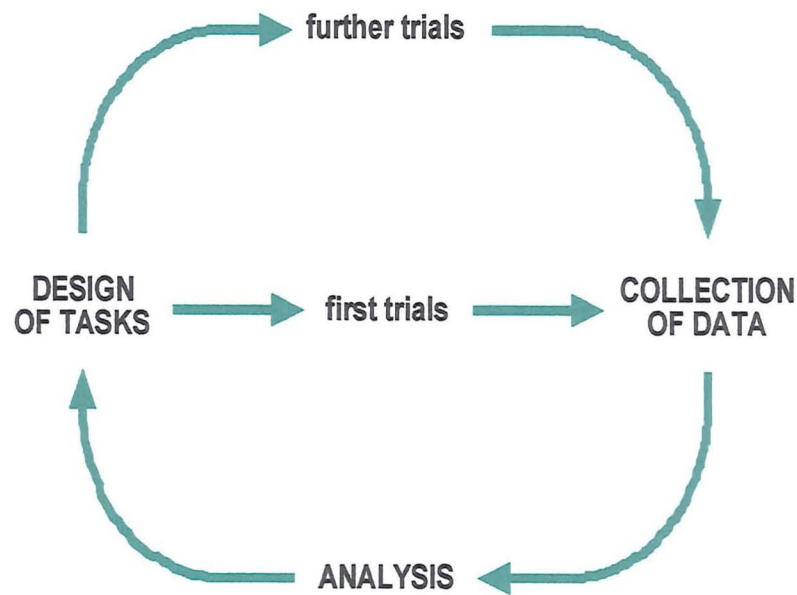
The next question to consider is: *are we comparing like with like?* This study aims at a double comparison: 1) between three age groups; 2) between two countries. Specific problems concerning comparison here are those related to the need of matching

comparable groups coming from two cultures. Efforts have been made in order to insure comparable groups, by matching them, as far as possible, by gender, social-economic background and academic ability. The technique here is matching at group-level, not at pair-level, so the target claims about students' ideas are themselves likely to be valid at group-level.

A subtler question is group matching with regard to students' teaching and learning experiences, both in history and at school in general. Many factors may be influencing the participants' responses, from general issues such as the debate around the aims of history teaching, or teachers' expectations from pupils, to more specific matters such as time of exposure to the discipline at school, or whether history is taught as a distinctive subject or integrated in the area of social sciences. Lately, a productive area of research in pupils' learning is looking at the external influences on their ideas about history. The characteristics of the past in different countries, and how this is treated *outside school* are important determinants in history learning *at school* (Seixas, 1996; Barton, 1996; Borries, 1998). Factors of all these sorts will be born in mind in relation to students' responses to the tasks, to study the similarities and differences detected in the categorized ideas of progression in Spain and England.

### **3. 1.3. Constant comparison method**

In a dialogue with the preliminary theoretical frames, empirical work develops as a process, from the design of research tasks to the collection of data and further trialling. Different steps were followed: first, exploratory studies aimed to focus or clarify the scope of the study, theoretically as well as practically; second, pilot studies oriented to test the relevance and validity of the tasks which would inform the main study; and third, the elaboration of the final study (see Figure 3.1).

**FIGURE 3.1 RESEARCH PROCESS FOR PILOT STUDIES.**

These methodological procedures originate from *grounded theory*, an ethnographic approach to empirical research, which utilizes induction to directly build theory from systematically generated data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through the method of constant comparison, grounded theory evolves from data analysis to written theory, attempting to reduce the gap between both elements of research. Grounded theory has greatly contributed to 'encourage theoretical sensitivity' in the work of ethnographers, who tended to limit themselves to descriptive narratives, given the enormous size and complexity of their data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983).

There is a dynamic interplay between theory, methods and data in fieldwork. The creation of analytical categories that make sense of collected data derives from the data themselves; both categories and hypotheses guide and direct further data collection. In this way, work at different stages of the research process operates throughout this project. Literature review, data collection, data analysis, reporting and discussion of the results are not steps that must be done along a linear temporal sequence. The process rather works back and forth. Data collection leads to data analysis, which, through progressive focusing, identifies new issues and helps refine the research questions. In its turn, new research problems will take the researcher back to the field for further data gathering.

In history sources cannot speak by themselves, their reading depends on the kind of questions that are asked. A similar process occurs in relation to empirical data. In the exploratory and pilot studies, tasks were conceived to get, first, a preliminary view of students' ideas, and to detect patterns in the way they respond; these tasks were refined thereafter to see better the moves pupils make, or to predict what kind of answers they can

give. These particular targeted questions are devised to allow the collection of meaningful and categorizable responses.

### 3. 2. Sample features and administration procedures

As explained above, this project is shaped as a *cross-sectional* and *cross-cultural* study of cognitive development in history, which looks at the extent to which student populations from two different countries reflect different or similar levels of understanding at different ages. The main goal is that data generated by this study can be deployed to construct models of how progression may take place between different levels of historical understanding.

Following the constant comparative method to achieve this goal, **exploratory** and **pilot studies** were developed through five rounds of trials, from November 1996 to December 1997, collecting data from a total of 180 students.

**TABLE 3.1.** Dates and number of students. Exploratory and Pilot studies.

<b>Trials</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Spain</b>
<b>1</b>	11-96/1-97	18	24
<b>2</b>	3-97/4-97	15	21
<b>3</b>	5-97/6-97	18	9
<b>4</b>	10-97	26	13
<b>5</b>	11-97/12-97	27	9
<b>Total</b>		<b>104</b>	<b>76</b>

Both for exploratory and pilot studies, as it would be later on for the main sample, empirical data were obtained from groups of English and Spanish students across three

bands of age: 12-13, 14-15 and 16-17 years, covering the developmental span which corresponds to compulsory secondary education and first year A-Levels/Bachillerato, both in England and Spain.

The schools involved in the trials --a total of eighteen-- were located in Cambridgeshire, Essex, inner-city London, Community of Madrid, inner-city Madrid and inner-city Barcelona. The sample included urban, suburban and rural schools. All except one were comprehensive. Two of the schools were bilingual, which means that the curriculum was delivered in English/ Spanish in one of them; a second one used Spanish/ Catalan across the curriculum.

During exploratory and pilot work, all the students volunteered or were selected by their history teachers, or by the heads of history (especially in England). For the first two rounds of trials, collaborative, participative pupils were preferred and only middle or high academic abilities were chosen. For the rest of trials, as in the final sample, mixed-ability groups were the norm. Apart from academic ability, the groups in England and Spain were also matched by gender and social background at group-level.

Several approaches were employed in the pilot studies for data-gathering purposes. Throughout the administration of tasks, small groups of usually two or three students were selected. Students were taken out from their classrooms and worked with the researcher. *Written tasks* (approximately one hour thirty minutes) and *interviews* (approximately twenty minutes) were administered to all the students. In written tasks, their performance was individual. In interviews, the use of small groups was favoured over one-to-one work. It was presumed that with the former method participants could be more relaxed and forthcoming in the presence of their peers, and in this way the researcher could learn more easily through the process. In every round, written tasks were followed by oral interviews, which were recorded (with students' permission); interviews were intended as follow-up questions to the written tasks, or new questions to complement and get deeper insights into the written data.

### 3.3. Research tools: design of tasks

Research tasks are the touchstone of the study. An adequate design of tools is indispensable to address the thorny question of how to obtain a valid and reliable measure of adolescents' historical understanding at a particular age. They are intended to give

students as wide opportunities as possible to show what they understand in history, with reference to their ideas about the relationship between significance and historical accounts. The starting point, therefore, is not a search for right or wrong answers; the enquiry starts from *listening to students* and *looking at their responses*, to decide how those responses can be categorized in order to construct patterns of progression which can be comparable across three groups of age and across two cultures. The criteria employed to categorize students' responses stem from the theoretical debate carried out by philosophers and historians, which establishes a conceptual apparatus, always subject to further discussion, in terms of what to think about students' responses.

Tasks were designed to be self-contained. In the exploratory studies, they consisted of one booklet with texts, illustrations and maps, and another booklet that the participants were asked to complete by writing and ticking options (see Appendices I and II). In the pilot studies, background information was progressively reduced and simplified (see Appendices IV, V and VI). Both background information and response booklets were reshaped and redesigned throughout the sequence of trials. Extreme care was taken over the appropriateness of language in the oral work and in the written tasks, which had to be the same for the three bands of age. For instance, to make language accessible to three different age groups, abstract nouns and elliptical uses were avoided as much as possible. In addition, we tried to avoid any judgemental language or historical weight on words, for instance, choosing factual statements rather than interpretative ones, if that was not the primary intention of the task.

In the design of the research tasks, it is very important to ensure that arbitrary differences are reduced to the minimum when understanding in two different countries is examined. Criteria for selection of the topic and the way in which this content was shaped considered:

- 1) context of existing teaching and learning;
- 2) complexity of substantive content in relation to age of pupils;
- 3) suitability of content.

Still, some problems of group matching in the aspect of content, between English and Spanish students, did occur. The range of possibilities about what content, and what kind of teaching, students have received is wider in England than in Spain. For older students, it is easier to know what they have studied at school in Spain than in England, because Spain had a centralized curriculum until the implementation of the LOGSE (MEC, 1990). This will be less of a problem with the English National Curriculum, but Sixth Form students had not experienced that in their compulsory education. These deficiencies have been overcome, in part, in pilot studies aimed to monitor the relationship of questions and background stories to students' answers.

The first topic we selected was *The defeat of the Spanish Armada of 1588*. It was employed for the first trials and also for the pilot and main studies. It aimed at comparing the perceptions of English and Spanish students in a familiar issue, which is commonly taught at school in both countries, but that had different significance for each one. One of the objectives of the research was the investigation of how central 'milestones' for one country may be just ignored by another. At school, the approach to this topic is not the same in both countries, not only because of the possible interpretations that may be taught, but, particularly, because of the different ways in which it is placed in the curriculum. In England the topic of the Spanish Armada is usually taught as a separate issue in Key Stage 2 (years 3 to 6) and as part of the unit about "The making of the United Kingdom" in Key Stage 3 (years 7 to 9) (DFE, 1995). In Spain it is mentioned only in the broader context of Philip II's European wars and foreign policy, both in 3° ESO (English year 10) or in Bachillerato (English years 12 to 13) (MEC, 1991; MEC, 1992).

Once the organization of content and the set of questions concerning the Armada's defeat was finally defined for the main study, a new kind of content, additional to the first one, was decided. It aimed to act as a point of reference to study the degree of stability in students' responses. This second theme was *The campaigns of Alexander the Great*, and it was trialled in the fifth cycle of pilot studies (see Table 3.1). Picked as 'neutral' content, the choice of this topic implied two main things. First, no direct involvement of any of students' nationalities, Spanish or English, was presumed; hence it was understood that significance would not change if nationality was taken as a variable for the comparative study. Second, it was expected to be a topic not generally taught at school, neither at compulsory level nor at A-Levels or Bachillerato. Comparison of responses to both topics, *The defeat of the Spanish Armada* and *The campaigns of Alexander the Great*, was intended to work as a form of triangulation.

Three main areas with regard to structural concepts were tentatively explored during the first year of research (cycles of trials 1, 2 and 3): rational explanation, causal explanation and significance, although the main focus on the exploratory studies lay on the first two strands.

a) *Rational explanation* seeks to understand an action in terms of intentions, purposes or motives; it is an analysis from the agent's point of view, and it must be aware of the agent's context (thoughts, values and beliefs).

b) *Causal explanation* operates in terms of factors or causal antecedents, either immediate causes (events, actions) or background conditions (processes, states of affairs). Causes may also be categorized by aspect: economic, social, cultural, etc.

c) *Significance* is based in the notions of selection and organization, on what is relevant for the scope of the account that is constructed. The notion of *relevance* establishes objective criteria to decide what is important within an account. This explains the historian's task as a relative matter; it depends on what point of view historians take to answer the questions they formulate. This definition makes explicit the idea that there is *no unquestionable set of significant facts* about an occurrence in history<sup>1</sup>.

For the first two strands, different kinds of questions were posed to students (see Appendices I and II):

- 1) open questions to give the reasons why Philip II of Spain decided to invade England in 1588, or to explain the causes of the defeat of the Armada and its failure to land a Spanish army in England;
- 2) questions aimed at deciding between alternative explanations which gave various types of reasons, or stated different kinds of causes; and
- 3) queries that directly confronted second-order concepts, such as the testing of competing explanations by factual support or by reference to the nature of the explanation itself.

For the strand of significance, at this early stage, two different sets of questions were proposed (not trialed at the same time) (see Appendix III):

- 1) open questions to explain the importance / unimportance of the defeat, as a whole;
- 2) questions about the possibility of competing interpretations in history, with regard to the defeat of 1588.

In the last trials (cycles 4 and 5), format and content of the research tasks was redefined, getting closer to the final form eventually adopted for the main study. Focus was sharpened, centred on the notion of significance. Content was organized in two parallel stories, running side by side vertically down a page; following Project *Chata* work on accounts (Lee & Ashby, 1998), the stories were designed both in terms of structure and content to meet the purposes of this research. Questions included open queries; closed questions where students had to decide between boxes and tick the appropriate ones, according to their views; a time-line in which they needed to select consequences relevant to the given event; and questions addressing directly second-order ideas (see Appendices IV, V and VI).

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<sup>1</sup> See also the definition of significance in section 2.5, Chapter 2.



### 3.4. Early data analysis and discussion of results

As we described above, several cycles of tasks were elaborated and trialed in the first year and the first term of the second year. At this stage, the concept of significance and its relationship to historical accounts had not been fully defined yet. Early empirical work sought to render more precise the substantive and structural content of the tasks and to structure the research questions. It started from previous studies which had extensively worked in the investigation of pupils' ideas in second-order concepts, especially the *Chata* Project (Lee & Dickinson, 1994; Lee et al., 1996a, 1996b, 1997).

#### 3.4.1. Exploratory studies (First and second cycles of trials)

Exploratory studies (see Table 3.1, p. 72) began with the investigation of students' ideas about historical explanation in the general strands of *rational understanding* and *causal explanation* (some of the best studied aspects in *Chata*), first in a broad sense and later in connection with two particular attributions of significance (not singled out for investigation in the *Chata* work): contemporary and causal attributions. The aim was to disentangle different overarching concepts, which usually work interlinked in historical accounts, to make possible the study of pupils' ideas about specific notions.

Progress was made by re-elaborating the tasks as a consequence of the flaws detected after analyzing pupil answers. The goal was to give pupils as wide opportunities as possible to show what they understood, having in mind the extent to which the tasks hit two basic targets:

- a) allowing the translation of what students think, therefore avoiding anything that failed to fit their ideas;
- b) facilitating the elaboration of workable sets of constructs, generated from students' ideas.

Below are shown several examples of how the system proceeds. They are not intended to describe the full range of the tasks that was developed at early or later stages, but just to present some of the questions aimed to explore the patterns of progression in *rational understanding* and *causal explanation*.

### Example 1

One of the questions of the first strand, about rational understanding, was directed to explore whether pupils favoured personal reasons over structural ones (see Appendix I, Question 2). As other work done in the field has shown (Carretero et al., 1994; Carretero, López-Manjón & Jacott, 1995; Torney-Purta, 1994), younger students are expected to favour personal reasons over mid/long term processes. Participants were confronted by the following task:

*Two historians give different explanations of why Philip decided to send the Armada to invade England:*

**A**

*Philip II of Spain sent the Armada to invade England because Drake had attacked the port of Cádiz in Spain.*

**B**

*Philip II of Spain sent the Armada to invade England to stop the English from interfering in America.*

Then they were asked if: 1) one explanation was better than the other; 2) if they could check if one explanation was better than the other and how there could be two different explanations of the same thing (A was intended to look at a short-term action and B to a mid-term process); and 3) if they could say how a good explanation in history works (in that question, second-order concepts were addressed directly). To the first question, Hugo, a Spanish (bilingual) student from year 8 answered:

I think that the first one is better because it happened in Spain and not in America.

The aim was to see if they could differentiate between explanations based on personal and immediate reasons, on the one hand, and more abstract and long-term reasons, on the other. But Hugo noticed the geographical fact, and he thought that something that happened in Spain would always be more important to Philip II than something that took place in America. This is not what the question was aimed at, but it made the researcher become more aware of the preference given to proximate causes over distant ones.

The wording was then changed to make clearer the personal character of Explanation A:

*Two historians give different explanations of why Philip decided to send the Armada to invade England:*

**A**

*Philip II of Spain sent the Armada to invade England to take revenge on Drake.*

**B**

*Philip II of Spain sent the Armada to invade England to stop the English from interfering in America.*

In this task, pupils tended to forget whether Explanation B was backed by the information given in the story or not. Students from year 8 usually opted for Explanation A "because it is told in the text", which confirmed one of the characteristics of younger pupils' reasoning in history: they remember better personalized concepts than structural ones.

## EXAMPLE 2

To further explore if younger pupils tend to choose personal reasons, the previous task was triangulated with another type of question for the same strand (*rational understanding*), which attempted to test possible reasons for action. In this case, students had to decide about the importance of causal antecedents, which differed ontologically (background conditions and states of affairs, events and actions) and by aspect (political, religious, personal, and economic). Instructions and a list of candidate necessary conditions were given. The question was stated as follows (see Appendix I, Question 4):

*Read the list of sentences 1-6 below.*

*Decide if any of the things in the list would have made a difference to Philip's decision to send the Armada, or not.*

*Put a tick (✓) if it would have made a difference.*

*Put a cross (X) if it would not have made a difference.*

*Philip's decision to send the Armada would/ would not have been different if...*

- ☐ 1. Holland had not rebelled against Philip.
- ☐ 2. There had been no gold in America.
- ☐ 3. The Pope had not excommunicated Elizabeth.
- ☐ 4. Drake had not attacked Cádiz.
- ☐ 5. Elizabeth had been Catholic.
- ☐ 6. England had not helped the rebels in Holland.

*Choose the two sentences that you think would have been most likely to make a difference. Say why.*

A typical personal-favoured answer is given by an English pupil from year 10, who chose statements 3, 4 and 5 as the things that would have most influenced Philip's decision:

If Elizabeth had been Catholic, then Philip would have had no disagreements with her in the first place. If Drake had not attacked Cádiz then he would not have felt so humiliated about the British sea power.

He considers personal (3, 4, 5) and religious (3, 5) matters as the most important. But to what extent are students taking 'Elizabeth' as a particular person or as a representation of the country, as historians frequently do? And are they overemphasizing the importance of religion because of a stereotyped view of the XVIth century or because religion is too highlighted in the background story? These are the kind of problems which arise when substantive concepts are used inferentially to explore the understanding of second-order ideas, and they are overcome by refocusing the specific research questions and further trialing.

### **Example 3**

To explore pupils' ideas about *causal explanation*, one of the tasks presented participants with three different explanations (see Appendix II, Question 2). Then, the questions aimed to see how pupils may decide between explanations, what makes an explanation better and which criteria they take into account to decide.

It was intended to check the relationships between information and explanation, and between fact and cause; also to study some ambiguous terms that pupils employed very often ('detail', 'information', 'fact', 'reason', 'cause') in a particular context.

**A**

*The Armada failed to land a Spanish army in England, although it had about 130 ships, carrying more than 20,000 soldiers and sailors, and they were kept in tight formation which the English could not break up. The English had ships that were light and easy to sail and their guns could fire very fast.*

**B**

*The Armada failed to land a Spanish army in England because English ships, weapons and tactics proved more effective than the Spanish ones. Besides, the Spanish army on the Dutch coast and the Spanish fleet could not link up.*

**C**

*The Armada failed to land a Spanish army in England because Spain could not send a really 'invincible' fleet, as Spain had to spend a lot of money in Europe for the defence of its Empire.*

These accounts were followed by the questions:

1. *Is one explanation better than the others are? Why?*
2. *Are the explanations related in any way? If so, can you explain the relationship between the three explanations? If not, can you explain why not?*
3. *Now could you give a better explanation of why the Armada failed to invade England?*

The accounts were: (A), a description of facts rather than a proper explanation; (B), an explanation based on immediate or intervening causes (technical and strategic) including 'because'; (C), an explanation based on background conditions (economic), also including the link 'because'.

In a provisional analysis of trials, it was clear that meaningful data were obtained in the first question, although sometimes further clarification was required when analyzing pupils' justifications.

Low-level responses were found which tend to assimilate 'more information' to 'better explanation'; this confirms the hypothesis suggested by other studies (Shemilt, 1980; Pozo, 1989; Domínguez & Pozo, 1994; Lee et al., 1996a). These replies also tend to remain at a personal-psychological level, when judging about historical explanations. A typical response, especially in years 8 and 10, is "that explanation is better because the language is clearer".

Pupils can appreciate differences of structure, but they tend to justify their reasoning only in terms of substantive content, weighting a main cause for the Armada's defeat, the 'technical' question, and dismissing the background economic condition. Most of younger children and a minority of the older ones chose 'A' as the best explanation. Most of year 12 students chose 'B'. Some older students hold clear 'positivist' positions with regard to the description, which is seen as more neutral: "'A' is better because it is what actually happened" (David, year 12). Few choices of type 'C' were selected even by older pupils, maybe because it focuses on a more distant/abstract cause or because the wording of sentences in 'C' are too ambiguous.

Students tended to compare the three choices with regard to the content (e.g., 'A' and 'B' "are more closely related because both talk about techniques and tactics")<sup>2</sup> It is necessary to check if the alternatives are related in a simple enough structural way, through follow-up questions.

#### Example 4

One of the earlier questions aimed directly at the notion of the significance of the Armada's defeat involved two alternative interpretations (see Appendix III, Question 2):

**A**

*If any one year marks the division between triumphant Spain and defeated, disillusioned Spain, that year is 1588 (Armada's defeat).*

**B**

*The Armada's defeat was a military failure, but not the beginning of the decline of Spain. The fear of Spanish power in England would last well into the 17th century.*

<sup>2</sup> The question of "aboutness" has been recently explored in the *Chata* Project.

Then the following questions were asked:

1. *What reasons do you think historian A could give for saying this?*
2. *What reasons do you think historian B could give for saying this?*
3. *How is it possible in history to have such different interpretations of the same thing?*

Worded in that way, some younger students, particularly Spanish, were not at ease trying to put themselves in the shoes of someone (the historian) whose role they could not see, or they have never thought about history in those terms. All this was detected only after having administered the tasks and having analyzed several responses from students. Therefore, the next step was to change the questions into the following:

1. *Which of these interpretations is nearer to what you think? Why?*
2. *How is it possible in history to have such different interpretations of the same thing?*

In students' answers, some patterns began to emerge. For instance, the idea that historians speak from different perspectives, and those differences are seen mainly in the light of historians' country of origin. So an English student from year 10 said, in his answer to Question 2:

If the situation is that such as the Armada, I think everybody would have taken a side, and I don't think there would have been a neutral [sic]. Each side would have had different perspectives.

Whereas other responses played down the possible conflict between interpretations. For example, a Spanish student from year 10, in her answer to the same question:

It depends on the point of view of every one; history is not as exact as maths... One can be more subjective than the other one, but both interpretations are valid.

Usually, English students tended to choose interpretation A and Spanish students interpretation B (see above), although this tendency was less strong among Spanish, probably because of a generalized view in Spanish teaching of the 17th as a century of crisis and decadence:

I think interpretation A is nearer to what I think. I don't think that England would have feared the Spanish, as they helped Holland break free from Spain after the Armada (year 10, English).

[The Armada's defeat] was the fact [sic] that triggered what happened next, Spain was in crisis. Then, [version] A is better (year 10, Spanish).

Later versions of the tasks tried to avoid a simplistic antithesis between Spanish/ English 'sides' in the presentation of alternative interpretations (they will be described and discussed in the section about the pilot studies, below).

Though results from the final sample will be referred to a particular context and a particular situation, early trials like those described above show that it is possible to construct provisional patterns, starting from recurrent ideas in which progression can be detected. Then some generalizable findings can be formulated.

### 3.4.2. Pilot studies

In the pilot studies, the project was gradually focused on *significance*, whereas the other two strands, rational understanding and causal explanation, were treated only in direct connection to that concept. Further refinement of the content and the questions which inform the tasks would establish the limits when research tasks were finally defined for the main study, taking into account that the aim was the construction of categorizable patterns of pupils' ideas about significance. This acted as an overarching concept, which connected particular aspects of the first two, such as the meaning given to events, actions and processes by contemporaries; the awareness of the hierarchy of causes within an event; or how causal weighting affects attributions of significance. Therefore, we study the nature of significance as defined by reference to its *attributions*, which establish the relationship between events and processes in an account. And we test the validity and relative truth of alternative accounts by means of objective criteria of relevance emerging from different sources or attributions of significance<sup>3</sup>.

#### 3.4.2.1. Third cycle of trials

In the third cycle of trials, (see Table 3.1), part of the empirical work was centred on *group discussion* to delineate more clearly the questions needed for the strand of significance, not leaving out yet the exploration of the first strands, rational and causal explanation. As a basis for discussion about concepts related to significance, such as importance or relevance, competing interpretations of the Armada's defeat were given (see Appendix II, Question 2).

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<sup>3</sup> The discussion about these criteria is held in Chapter 2.



From those semi-open discussions, some clearer patterns focused on the notion of significance started to emerge. For instance, the significance of a given event as a *turning point* in a process of development was highlighted:

The importance of SA lies in the long-lasting assertion of British political superiority over Spain and all the relevant effects this had on world history (Tom, year 12, English).

Moreover, the idea of *symbolic* significance was also grasped:

The British Empire was grounded on its strong navy... Symbolically, this is the first time our navy kind of... really proved itself as a small force, that could beat a much stronger force such as Spain... and that, kind of, really started to establish the impression that the British had also a very good navy... and could conquer some more lands later (Tom, year 12, English).

*Lessons* for history were another component of historical significance that occurred to pupils:

The defeat could have showed people not to be greedy (Anne-Marie, year 10, English).

Other students were aware of the connection distinguishing between *past* importance and *present* significance. In response to questions such as "What do you think the Armada's defeat meant to the contemporaries? And to us?", three students interacted in the following way:

Lucas: I don't think it affected us at all.

Arianna: I think it did.

Lucas: How does it affect you, let's see?

Arianna: I think it affects us because if the Spanish had won, maybe now there would not be Church of England. That was Philip' purpose, to finish off Protestantism.

Lucas: I don't see who can be bothered with this nowadays.

Maite: Everything has an influence, either big or small.

(year 12, bilingual Spanish/ English).

High ability English students could differentiate in very neat terms the link between contemporary and historical significance, making implicit reference, at the same time, to the concepts of *intrinsicity* and *contextuality*:

You can talk about the importance of something that affects you now... or the importance of something that offered something to the time, or whose effects can still be seen (Adam, year 12, English).

Something important in history is something that shaped history, from the present point of view... The problem is to judge the future effects of each "big" event (Tom, year 12, English).

Therefore, the significance of a happening must be assessed only with hindsight, as we saw when we discussed about the notion of "consequential" or *causal* significance (see Chapter 2).

Asked about the question of historians' interpretations and the reasons why those may disagree, some older students come implicitly to the conclusion that, rather than being given, causal weighting is generated by the historian, yet this does not justify a general lack of objectivity in history:

You can place different emphasis on different things, I mean, there is no reason why an English or a Spanish historian... in the context of the reasons why the English won a battle, the main difference is in which factors you place your importance... but still you can be an objective historian... The point is if you're trying to be an objective historian or you're trying to be a propagandist (Tom, year 12, English).

#### **3.4.2.2. Fourth cycle of trials**

Through the fourth cycle of trials, tasks were further refined. Content topics (the significance of the defeat of the Spanish Armada and, later, also the campaigns of Alexander the Great) were presented in the form of two alternative accounts, which differed from one another in aspect, evaluative tone and time-scale, and in which different attributions of significance were lent (contemporaries, causal, pattern, etc.). This followed a model of research tasks already devised, though in that case for the question of accounts, in the *Chata* Project (Lee, 1996). As we described above (see p. 76), open and closed questions were included, addressing second-order ideas directly in some of the questions, and indirectly through queries about substantive content (see Appendix VI).

#### **Problems in the design of the tasks**

Analysis was oriented towards detection of particular problems in the design of the tasks. For example, it became clear that it was necessary to reword the introductory accounts to

allow pupils to explore more explicitly the Armada's contemporary and symbolic significance. Students usually give grounds for the researcher to talk about causal or pattern attributions, but very rarely contemporary or symbolic.

Some questions needed further treatment as well. For instance, Spanish students seemed somewhat puzzled when they came to the sentence *Does the Armada's defeat matter the same in both stories?* (Spanish: *¿Importa la derrota de la Armada lo mismo en las dos historias?*). Confusion may arise between 'story' (referred to the task) and 'history' (referred to English history or Spanish history, in general); a point that seemed to be particularly tricky in Spanish ('historia' is the same word for both senses: 'history' and 'story').

Yet the most outstanding issue in the arrangement of the tasks was the disproportionate weight given to the difference in *tone* or *perspective* (Spanish/English) from which each story is written. Students could then be led too easily towards the evaluation of the Armada's defeat as very important, and to explain differences between stories only in terms of nationalities. The question of *previous knowledge* was also tackled, because understanding varies a lot according to the previous knowledge students have. When asked (in interview) about the relative difficulty of the two stories, all students from year 8 in one of the English schools said: "Story 2 was easier" (the one built in a way from the English side), whereas all students from year 8 and year 10 in a Catalan school said: "Story 1 was easier" (the one from the Spanish side). Even Jessica, year 12 (English school, but she is Mexican and she had no previous knowledge of the Spanish Armada), said: "Story 1 was easier". The weight of cultural context was easily seen there.

To reduce striking --and unwanted-- differences between both stories, tone was played down by adding some more positive statements to Spanish aspects in the second story, and revising the ending of the first story. In addition, ways were tried to facilitate reading comprehension and short-term memorization such as dividing each story into chapters. To avoid misleading moves in students' reading of the stories, pictures were taken away and left only for the background information sheets. These modifications would take place in the tasks finally designed for the main study (see Appendices V and VI).

#### First descriptive categories

Coming back to the fourth cycle of trials, some first descriptive categories were defined, on the basis of grouping common features about students' ideas of importance in historical events. Below we present these preliminary categories, from which we can start to construct levels of progression.

*a) Everything is important in history*

Almost all students thought that the Armada's defeat was important. Sometimes students take for granted that history in itself confers on events the status of importance. This seemed to justify, to a certain extent, their judgement:

...and finally I think the Armada's defeat is important simply because it is a historical fact (Helena, year 10, Spanish).

I think the Armada's defeat matters, as any other historical fact, to a bigger or lesser extent (Nerea, year 10, Spanish).

It is interesting to remark that this kind of response appears to be more frequent in Spanish than in English students.

*b) Importance as a way of assessing events*

Across the three age groups, other students are more conscious about the notion of importance as a means of assessing events; they can discriminate factors to decide upon events. Different attributions of significance are given. For instance, some students explain their answer to the first open question (*Some historians think that the Spanish Armada's defeat was really important; others think it wasn't. What do you think? Was it important or not? Explain why it mattered or why it did not matter*, Appendix IV, Question 1) in terms of causal significance:

I think it [the Armada's defeat] was important as it made countries independent. It stopped the Catholics from trying to rule everywhere and it made Spain a weak country. It made England stronger by owning more of the world (Ben, year 10, English).

Others stretch the consequences to the present, taking the Armada as an example of an event which works as a turning-point in a *pattern of change* that develops in a long span of time, implicitly or explicitly. The use of counterfactual arguments is frequent:

The Armada meant the strengthening of Protestantism in Europe and the beginning of the weakening of Spain as a world power (Joan, year 12, Spanish).

I think the Armada's defeat was very important because if it had succeeded, Spain might possibly be a more powerful country today, as this defeat led to the steady decline of Spain as a world power. The English victory also shaped the religion of England today (Philip, year 10, English).

Many students, especially from year 12 (and year 13, only for this trial), but also from year 10, give both *short-term consequences* and *long-term patterns* as justifications to explain the importance of the Armada's defeat. Some students underline far-reaching consequences:

If the Armada had succeeded, the implications would last [sic] for a long time, and no doubt affect England in a number of ways that would still be apparent today (Chris, year 12, English).

That assumption, though, is not widespread across all levels of age. Both English and Spanish younger students tend to explain the importance in terms of short-term consequences of the battle. In the Spanish example below, the idea of 'lessons of history' arises.

The defeat was important because we lost a lot of ships and guns and, above all, lots of men (Ferrán, year 8, Spanish).

[The defeat was important because] it was a lesson (for the Spanish), they realized they were not as strong, but it is not a good thing, because a lot of innocent people died, and people who wanted to go also died (Vicenç, year 8, Spanish).

Some pupils highlighted long-term consequences in what looks like a model of sheer *monocausality*:

If the Spanish had not been defeated, they would still be a large Empire, and Britain would only be a small Empire [sic] with a weak army (James, year 10, English).

### *c) Perspectives change the degree of importance: historians take sides*

Historians are very often seen as being "naturally biased"; they speak from different countries to different audiences. These kinds of observations are mostly made by students from year 10 and 12. Perspectives are considered, not as something inherent in history, but rather as personal biases that should be avoided, if objective history is wanted.

Historians always take sides because of political, religious, cultural reasons (Sebastián, year 10, Spanish).

The historians who wrote these stories [Story 1 and Story 2] don't seem to be very objective (Joan, year 12, Spanish).

There are objective historians. For instance, in this case, a French historian would be more objective (Iván, year 12, Spanish).

In some other cases, the notion of importance seems to be bypassed, and differences are only established by two sides, Spain or England. The argument seems to be as follows: if the Armada's defeat mattered to England and it mattered to Spain, then it mattered *the same* in both stories, one being positioned from England and the other from Spain:

Yes [it matters the same], because for the Spanish it meant to lose their reputation and for the English [it meant] to conquer more lands (Sandra, year 12, Spanish).

It matters the same, although it affected different people (in both stories) (Philip, year 10, English).

Yes, because for the English it was a victory; for the Spanish unfortunately not, and a lot of people died (Vicenç, year 8, Spanish).

There are strong indications of pattern significance in some responses:

The Armada matters the same in both stories because it *marked* the decline of Spain and the rising of England (Chris, year 12, English; stress added).

*d) Perspectives change the degree of importance: different attributions of significance are mentioned and evaluated*

Progression is shown in the contrast of some responses. In Question 2 (*Does the Armada's defeat matter the same in both stories?*), the answer 'No' is selected by the following number of students:

- Year 8: 1 (out of 8)
- Year 10: 7 (out of 12)
- Year 12-13: 12 (out of 18).

High level responses tended to look like this:

I don't think SA mattered the same in both stories. In story 1, it plays down the effect of the Armada's defeat on Spain, placing more importance on the effect of crop failure and plague in the decline of the Spanish Empire. Whereas in Story 2, it sees the Armada's defeat as the first serious setback in the decline of Spain and the rising of England as a major maritime power (Katy, year 12, English).

Thus significance depends on the aspect and time-scale decided for each account. The sense that the account changes because it is modeled according to the audience is highlighted as well, particularly by older students:

Who is reading the account? (Caroline, year 12, English).

When students are confronted with briefer and more explicitly targeted historical accounts (such as those in Appendix V, Question 9), most pupils think the Armada does not matter the same. But they cannot always explain the differences:

In 'A' the Spanish had a big army and fleet, and Philip was the powerful king. In 'B' they started raising taxes (Manpraet, year 10, English).

Some year 12 students offer a very neat analysis about various interpretations of the defeat (again with reference to Question 9):

In source A the defeat of the Armada is played down, and emphasizes that Philip was still very powerful in spite of being defeated. In sources B and C the defeat is seen as much more significant, precipitating the decline of the Spanish Empire and a loss of confidence in Philip by the Spanish people. This led to the rise of the English Empire and the English navy becoming more powerful (Katy, year 12, English).

Different attributions of significance are recognized here: negative significance for the Spanish (version A), causal significance for the Spanish (version B), and causal and pattern significance for the English (version C).

### 3.4.2.3. Some findings with regard to cultural comparison

Students usually made the assumption that Story 1 was written by a Spanish historian, whereas Story 2 was written by an English historian. Many responses (particularly in Question 1) were built from a single perspective (English/Spanish), habitually that of their own country. Among the younger ones, the use of 'us' or 'we' to talk about events in the distant past was much more frequent. But across all age levels, students tend to summarize the consequences for just one country, depending on their country of origin. One could say that the *national* perspective might blind any other. For instance:

The Armada mattered because it meant that England kept its independence and religion [no mention of any consequence for Spain or other countries] (Chris, year 12, English)

The Armada is important because of its consequences: it weakened our economy, and one can add up bad weather, plague, etc.; all together had an influence on Spain (Nerea, year 10, Spanish).

The defeat was important, but not because of the battle in itself, but because of its consequences: Spain spent a lot of money and had too many debts; that was, I think, the beginning of the Spanish decline (Iván, year 12, Spanish).

Students themselves can explain this recurrence. Some remarked that primary history is often taught in stereotyped terms. In the interview, two year 12 students (Rebecca and Joanne, English) pointed out the fact that they had only learnt British history:

Until the Sixth Form we've been taught only about the good things your country did (Joanne, year 12, English).

One of them had written in her task:

It does not matter the same [in both stories] because Spanish people were beaten; they may be reluctant in teaching about it. In history we normally learn about things in which our countries were victorious. English will boast about this, Spanish people may be ashamed because they lost (Rebecca, year 12, English).

One question is, therefore, to what extent responses like some of those mentioned above are rooted in stereotypes taught at school. While most students from year 10 and 12 make some reference to the pattern of the British Empire's rising, either isolatedly or with its counterpart, the Spanish decline, no Spanish student mentions the first one; some Spanish students includes the pattern of the Spanish decline, but never in parallel with the British rise.

This suggests the hypothesis that students have acquired some stereotyped ideas in history, or have received explicitly or implicitly taught patterns (at school or outside), and these patterns come up, in their reading of two different stories, explaining things in a way that conforms to those patterns. Thus some English students explain the importance of the Armada's defeat in terms of the development of the British Empire, while some Spanish students only see --in the cases they do-- consequences for the Spanish decadence.

#### **3.4.2.4. Fifth cycle of trials**

In this last round of pilot studies, the second type of content mentioned above, *the campaigns of Alexander the Great*, was added to those tasks previously trialed. The format of the tasks was similar to that of the Spanish Armada: text, maps and colour pictures, as background information, and two stories running side by side on one page, in the form of



competing interpretations on the basis of which questions were asked. Three different kinds of queries were formulated (see Appendices V and VI):

- a) questions that replicated those posed in the tasks about the Spanish Armada (e.g., Questions 1 and 2);
- b) questions that complemented some sections of those tasks (e.g., Question 8 of the Armada and Question 9 of Alexander);
- c) new questions addressing the problem of significance through substantive content (e.g., Question 7) or directly (e.g., Question 3, both in the Armada).

Again, *progression* could be detected *across* groups of age and *inside* the same age group (ability). For instance, to the question *Does what Alexander did matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?*, a student from year 8 answered:

Yes. I think it does matter the same by Story 1 saying that Alexander built 70 new towns, and tried to do a lot of good things, the same as Story 2. Both stories favour Alexander and don't say anything bad about him (Léa, year 8, English).

It seems that this student only sees a case for alternative interpretations when 'sides' are taken. This was one of the features intended to be contrasted with different kinds of content. Here no hint of nationalities is given, yet the student's sense of partisanship is still strong; it may be said that this sense is hindering the possibility for her to consider other differences, such as aspect or time-scale. For other students of the same year (in the same question), though, aspect is enough to make a value judgement:

No, I don't think it matters the same, because making everyone the same class is better than building roads and towns (Hollie, year 8, English).

For older students, grasping change in perspectives (still in the same question) is more frequent:

No, because his father in Story 1 did all the work before he died and Alex then carried on from where his father had left it, but in Story 2 it says that the campaigns to take over new lands were not just of conquest (Matthew, year 10, English).

In Story 1, Alexander's life is told in a more historical and warrior-like fashion (what he conquered, what he did...). In Story 2 that is mentioned, but more superficially, stressing the importance of Alexander's greatness... and the economic and trade systems, new towns and the way different races lived together in those towns (Yago, year 12, Spanish).

The analysis of exploratory and pilot work operated as a preview of the more systematic analysis that would be deployed in the main study. At this stage, only very crude categories could be offered, but they were a useful initial basis from which further analysis may be built on more solid bases. These preliminary categories and discursive elements will serve as a starting point for the next chapter.

## 4. METHODS AND MATERIALS. MAIN STUDY

### 4.0. Introduction

The previous chapters situated the concept of significance in the frame of earlier theoretical discussion, and discussed some examples from different cycles of trials. In this chapter, the following aims will be addressed. Firstly, to summarize sample features and administration procedures that were undertaken for the main study. Secondly, to show how the concept of significance --linked to historical accounts-- operated in the two particular kinds of historical content that were selected for the research tasks, *The defeat of the Spanish Armada of 1588* (SA), and *The campaigns of Alexander the Great* (AG). Thirdly, to present the provisional categories with which this study was operating at earlier stages, and to discuss some examples (including some problematic instances) arising from the relationship between conceptual tools and empirical work.

### 4.1. Sample features and administration procedures

Bearing in mind that the empirical research work was intended to be, on the one hand, reasonably representative, and on the other hand, as little disruptive as possible in students' and teachers' educational life, small groups of students were chosen from different kinds of schools. The planned number of schools involved in the main study was six in each country (a total of twelve schools, twelve students --four individuals in each band of age-- from each school). Yet division by age groups is different in each country; in Spain, primary schools include children from 6 to 14 years of age. After the reform of the LOGSE<sup>1</sup>, Primary Education finishes at 12, and Secondary Compulsory Education runs from 12 to 16. With the new law, schools were planned to be reorganized as Primary (6-12) and Secondary (12-16/18), but this has not yet implemented in the majority of them. That is the reason eleven schools were eventually selected in Spain, that is, six secondary

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<sup>1</sup> Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo, or Law for the General Organization of the Educational System (MEC, 1990).

and five primary, because only one of the Spanish schools included the whole range of Secondary Education. In all cases, when a primary school was required to complement a secondary school in Spain, both belonged to the same catchment area. In England, the total number of schools which were selected was seven, because only in one case did two schools from the same area have to complement each other to cover the three required age-bands.

In order to attain a representative sample of schools, they were also matched by geographical location: urban, suburban and rural. In England, the selection of schools was made in inner-city London, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire and Essex. In Spain, it took place in inner-city Madrid and Community of Madrid.

Empirical data for the main study was obtained from the same three bands of age as for the previous exploratory and pilot studies: **12-13**, **14-15** and **16-17** years of age. In Spain and England, mixed-ability groups of four members each were selected for each band of age. Each group aimed to include one high-ability, two middle-ability and one low-ability students, preferably two girls and two boys. They were matched by ability, gender and social background across countries as groups, not individually. Selection was made by the researcher (at random) from lists elaborated by the teachers. Groups were matched by social background through schools, because although all participants for the final study were selected from state and comprehensive schools both in England and Spain, performance results and social background varied from one school to another.

The number of participants remained as planned: 72 students in each country, making a total of 144 students. They were selected as mixed-ability groups (described above) in every school from a list of assessment results of every classroom that was involved, both in history and in general achievement. By gender, 36 students were girls and 36 boys in Spain, whereas in England 38 were girls and 34 boys<sup>2</sup>.

Written tasks were administered to all students once these were taken out of their classrooms. They lasted approximately one hour thirty minutes, although older students usually needed less time. When possible, all three groups belonging to the three age-bands in each school worked together, under the supervision of the researcher. Great care was taken in responding to all queries and doubts with regard to procedural matters, particularly in the case of the younger pupils from each group. Again, as in the exploratory and pilot work, a great concern was shown among some students (and even teachers!), especially in Spain, about their giving the 'right' answer. A relaxed atmosphere was encouraged, trying to avoid any implications --on the part of the students-- of the tasks operating as means for 'testing'.

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<sup>2</sup> In the grouping of students, ability was preferred over gender.

After the completion of written tasks, all students were interviewed by the researcher. Interviews usually lasted thirty minutes. All of them were carried out individually and recorded with students' permission. All younger students and almost all older ones were interviewed in the same day that they responded to the written tasks (everyone else was interviewed by the following day).

Data gathering for the main study was accomplished during the second and third terms of the academic year 1997-1998. It was carried out in two separate periods in each country, one for each of the two task-sets, the Spanish Armada and Alexander the Great.

Fortunately, and despite various unexpected circumstances<sup>3</sup>, attrition from the first task-set to the second was relatively low: only two interviews in Spain and four interviews in England could not be carried out, but written tasks for the two task-sets were completed by all participants.

After the last cycles of trials, the format and content of the research tasks had been finally defined. Content was organized in two parallel stories, running vertically down a page, written in the form of two competing accounts (as will be described in the next section). Questions included open and closed queries, addressing indirectly --through substantive content-- or directly second-order understandings with regard to significance and accounts in history (see Appendices V and VI).

## 4.2. Research tasks: structural and substantive content

The specific topics chosen for the purposes of this research (see Chapter 3, section 3.3) are organized in the form of two *competing accounts*, or different interpretations of the same matter in connection with the question of significance. A different hypothesis underlies each account.

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, in one school located in the Sierra de Madrid five interviews for the first task-set had to be postponed until the second collection of data because communications were cut off by a snowstorm and some students could not reach their school that day.

#### 4.2.1. The defeat of the Spanish Armada of 1588

In our first example (see Appendix V), which deals with the significance of *the defeat of the Spanish Armada of 1588*, the following hypotheses are opposed:

##### Account 1:

Although the defeat of the Spanish Armada had important consequences in the short term, different for the Spanish and the English, the international situation in Europe did not substantially change, and the Spanish Empire continued to be a great power until 1700.

##### Account 2:

The defeat of the Spanish Armada was a major turning point in the history of Spain and England; it marked the beginning of the Spanish Empire's decline and the emergence of the process of English expansion, which would culminate in the formation of the British Empire.

In each account, different events are selected and when the same events are included, different meaning is attached to them.

In the first story, political and religious aspects are emphasized, the time span runs only until 1700, and the defeat is seen as an immediate cause with no particular consequences in the long term, either for Spain or for England. It is implicitly stated that Philip II sent the Armada against England mainly because of political and religious reasons, based on the following background conditions:

- England had become a Protestant country under Elizabeth I, and she was determined to keep her kingdom Protestant to make Spanish interference more difficult;
- Philip II wanted the Spanish Empire to be hegemonic in Europe; Catholicism was seen as a fundamental means for the Empire's unity and to maintain that hegemony;
- the Dutch used the religious question for its purposes of acquiring independence from the Spanish Empire;
- England saw the Dutch rebellion against Spain as a chance to fight the Spanish dominance in Europe. Thus England as well as Holland chose a Protestant way against Catholicism and the Spanish Empire.

Contemporaries regarded the Spanish Armada's defeat from different perspectives:

- the Spanish considered it as a blow for their reputation and as a contributory cause for the continuity of Holland's revolts, but it had minor consequences for Philip II and his mainstream policies concerning the Spanish Empire, whose principal rival in Europe was France, rather than England or other Protestant countries;
- the English judged the defeat as a proof of God's will, which Elizabeth I exploited to reassure her authority in the kingdom. The defeat also allowed the Queen to invest in new fleets, for it had been demonstrated that England could rival Spain at sea;
- Holland could continue its rebellion, but its independence from the Spanish Empire was not a matter of fact until much later, sixty years after the defeat.

Therefore, the long-term causal power of the defeat is played down in the first account:

- the defeat had no important consequences for Spain or England in the long run; the war between both countries continued, and new Armadas were sent by Philip II;
- the economic crisis of the 17th century is not mentioned;
- the very size of the Empire allowed its internal division, but only at the end of a very long process which lasted more than one century;
- the colonial expansion achieved by Holland and England in the 17th century was not made at Spanish expense.

In conclusion, the Spanish Armada's defeat was an unfortunate episode for Spain and a conjunctural victory for England in 1588, but the main fact is that the Spanish Empire continued to be a great power until 1700. Possible criteria to evaluate the significance of the defeat in this story are: religious and symbolic aspects, different perspectives taken by contemporaries and awareness of a causal hierarchy among events subsequent to 1588.

In the second story, economic and strategic aspects are highlighted; events are organized along a different time-scale, which runs up to nowadays; and the defeat is regarded as a turning-point in two parallel teleological processes of decadence (Spain) and ascent (England). It is assumed that Philip II sent the Armada mainly for economic and strategic reasons, grounded on the following antecedents:

- England wanted a share in American trade; English ships attacked Spanish ships with a more or less direct encouragement from the English government;
- Holland was a crucial territory for the control of the North Atlantic ocean;
- England needed an ally on the Channel's continental side, and thus the English supported the Dutch rebellion against Spain.

The role of the Spanish Armada's defeat as a catalyst for processes of change in the long run is stressed in this second account. The defeat is seen as a long-term cause of Holland's independence and England's colonial expansion. Besides, after the defeat the Spanish Empire was deeply damaged: although it continued to be an important political power, the Spanish economy would never recover itself. The defeat of 1588 meant the beginning of the loss of the Empire for Spain, and the start of the building of the British Empire.

To tone down the 'conflict' between the two accounts, the loss of Empires is seen as a closed process, both for Spain, first, and then for Britain. At the end of the second story, England and Spain are presented as "two well-off countries within the European Union", showing no rivalry between them.

In the second account, economic aspects of diverse consequence and patterns of development emplotted as decline and rise are the main criteria on the basis of which to decide upon the significance of the Armada's defeat.

#### **4.2.2. The campaigns of Alexander the Great**

The second example (see Appendix VI) deals with the significance of the campaigns of Alexander the Great, shown from two different perspectives. Underlying alternative hypotheses could be summarized as:

##### Account 1

Alexander took over the work that his father had started. Alexander was a military genius, but the final balance of his achievements can be depicted as a failure in the long term.

##### Account 2

Alexander was not only a conqueror, but also a reformer and explorer; his achievements changed the world, which could not be understood without his legacy. Historical deeds are entangled into a legend that is alive even today.

The first account highlights the inheritance of Alexander's father, Philip of Macedonia; thanks to that inheritance and to his personal features as general and political leader, Alexander achieved astounding success in his lifetime. His campaigns were mainly of



conquest; newly founded towns were built as political and military centres. However, Alexander's ideal of an empire based on Greek culture and racial equality was never achieved. Greeks, Macedonians and Persians were united under a common authority only when Alexander was alive. After his death, the Hellenistic Empire fell apart, the majority of its towns did not survive, and finally most of its territories were dominated by Rome, the new world power.

In this story, military and political aspects, contemporaries' views and short-term consequences are the criteria against which to assess the significance of Alexander's deeds.

The second account emphasizes the economic and cultural consequences of Macedonian expansion. Alexander's campaigns are seen not just as a conquest, but also as the pursuit of knowledge. His father's exploits are not mentioned. Newly founded towns were economic and cultural centres. The building of towns and the opening of new trade routes are portrayed as long-lasting achievements. After his death, the world seemed to be opened out, both to the peoples from East and West. Alexander is regarded as a hero, conqueror and explorer, whose legacy has survived to our present time.

Therefore, Alexander's campaigns are seen in this second story as a turning point in the history of Asia and Europe. Economic and cultural aspects, long-term processes and the connection between past and present, besides symbolic values of a legend still alive are main criteria for the evaluation of Alexander's significance.

### **4.3. Preliminary categorization of main data responses**

A first framework of provisional categories was built on the basis of the analysis of students' responses during the different cycles of trials. This conceptual apparatus would be modified at later stages, once new and deeper insights were gained after the analysis of main empirical data (see Chapter 5).

### 4.3.1. Provisional categories

#### A) INTRINSICALITY / CONTEXTUALITY

##### - Referred to the relationship between significance and accounts

Progression:

When there is no awareness of that relationship: *intrinsicity*

1. Importance is not an issue
2. Events are only important 'per se'

When that relationship is detected: *contextuality*

3. Events are important / acquire significance in the context of an account

#### B) DISTINCTION OF ATTRIBUTIONS OF SIGNIFICANCE

##### - In connection with causal weighting:

###### IMPORTANCE

Progression:

1. Importance is not an issue
2. Everything is important
3. Importance is a way of assessing events: intrinsicity; significance is fixed
4. Importance is a way of assessing events in relation to other events: contextuality; single attributions of significance
5. Importance is a way of assessing events in relation to other events: contextuality; different attributions of significance; significance changes within / across each attribution

##### - In connection with interpretation:

###### EMPLOTMENT AND STORY PARAMETERS

Progression:

1. No indication of the notion
2. Evidence of awareness of the notion

POINT OF VIEW

Progression:

1. No sign of the notion
2. Only an opinion ('just as anybody else's')
3. Historians' personal and social biases, interests, likes, dislikes, ideology, social background
4. Historians' intentions (sense of the audience)
5. Necessary condition in history practice (it responds to the logic of the account, such as different theories in causal weighting or different attributions of significance)

## C) VALIDITY AND TRUTH IN RELATION TO SIGNIFICANCE AND ACCOUNTS

(Different criteria, not yet in any hierarchy of progression):

- a. Distinction between history as the past and history as account
- b. Appeal to criteria for validity and truth
- c. Differentiation in the criteria for testing facts and interpretations

## D) DISTINCTION OF TYPES OF ATTRIBUTIONS:

**- Significance for contemporaries; causal, pattern, symbolic significance; significance for the present and the future**

(Not yet in any hierarchy of progression):

1. Single attribution of significance
2. Different attributions of significance

## **5. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DATA ANALYSIS**

### **5. 0. Introduction**

After successive stages of analysis of the main empirical data, preliminary categories were gradually developed and redefined, following the grounded theory approach (see Chapter 3, section 3.1.3). The analysis of responses was based on the following stages: a) successive readings and re-readings; b) the inductive construction of categories; and c) the coding of each appearance of indication for the categories in students' responses. For category systems, particularly in the broad strand of 'Types of significance', counter-coding was carried out by an independent coder and agreement of 90% was achieved.

This chapter describes the final conceptual framework whose findings are stated and discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 (see also Table 5.1). Students' responses were categorized in level-scales of progression that correspond to different strands aimed to define the overarching notion of significance in its relation to historical accounts as conceived by secondary school students in England and Spain. These level-scales will constitute the final model of progression that is described in the last chapter of this work (Chapter 8).

Here it is explained what the categories and levels mean and how they work in practice. The first section corresponds to the categorization of empirical data according to the relationship between significance and accounts in history. The second section deals with the types of attributions of significance.

**TABLE 5.1.** Strands in which categories are organized

<b>SIGNIFICANCE AND ACCOUNTS</b>	<b>Intrinsicality / Contextuality</b>
	<b>Importance</b>
	<b>Emplotment and Story Parameters</b>
	<b>Point of View</b>
	<b>Validity and Truth</b>

<b>TYPES OF SIGNIFICANCE</b>	<b>Contemporary</b>
	<b>Causal</b>
	<b>Pattern</b>
	<b>Symbolic</b>
	<b>Present / Future</b>

## **5. 1. Relationship between significance and accounts**

### **5.1.1. Intrinsicality / Contextuality**

The first notion we encounter in our search to explore students' ideas about significance in history is precisely the relationship between our main concept and historical accounts. Do pupils conceive the significance of an occurrence as isolated, that is to say, do they consider only the *intrinsic* importance of an event or a process, or do they see it in connection with a *context*, either particular or general? This matter is studied through students' responses to the following items in research tasks: the Spanish Armada (SA) Q1-Q2, Alexander the Great (AG) Q1-Q2 and SA Q3 (see Appendices V and VI, pp. 306-307 and 319). The dual notion of *Intrinsicality / Contextuality* refers to a basic relationship between significance and accounts, and it originates from two particular research questions:

To what extent do students think about the significance of an occurrence in relation to something else?

How far do students see occurrences of the past as acquiring their significance in the context of an account?

Progression is shown from ideas in which there is no indication of awareness of a relationship between significance and accounts to ideas in which a relationship is detected. This progression could be charted as follows:

## CATEGORIES

### - INTRINSICALITY / CONTEXTUALITY

- Referred to the relationship between significance and accounts

Progression:

When there is no sign of awareness of that relationship: *intrinsicity*

1. **Importance is not an issue**
2. **Intrinsicity:** events are only important 'per se'

When that relationship is detected: *contextuality*

3. **Contextuality:** events are important / acquire significance in the context of an account

The first category, *Importance is not an issue*, includes problems of general comprehension and responses that do not seem to recognize the notion of importance as relevant to history; they may refer to the particular event in an isolated way; it is frequently associated with stereotyped moral judgements. Examples for this category include the following:

[Wr] Yes, yes because in the 16th century Philip II of Spain sent an armada (fleet of armed ships) to invade England. The queen of England was Elizabeth (David, yr 8, Sp 3, SA Q1)<sup>1</sup>.

Here what David seems to do is just to copy the first sentence that comes up in the task, offering it as an answer to the question about the importance of the Armada's defeat.

The second category, *Intrinsicity: events are only important per se*, is used to code responses that give no indication of an awareness of the relationship between significance

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<sup>1</sup> From this chapter onwards, examples will be identified by student's first name, year group, school (either English or Spanish), number of school, task-set and question. The symbol [Wr] refers to the script; [Int] refers to interview data. The latter are quoted in inverted commas.

and accounts; they deal with the notion of *intrinsic* importance only, and are usually associated with contemporary significance only or, at most, with immediate causal significance. For example:

[Wr] I think that the Armada's defeat was important, because it was a hard battle and also it was important to the country who beat them. I think it did matter because England beat them and also it's part of history (Clare, yr 8, En 6, SA Q1).

Clare's reference to the English victory as "part of history" seems to be part of its intrinsic importance, there is no evidence that it refers to an additional symbolic or cultural significance for a country, but rather to the notion that everything is important from the past; it indicates an unawareness of the issue of *selection* in history writing; 'history' is characteristically equated to 'the past'.

The third category, *Contextuality: events are important / acquire significance in the context of an account*, corresponds to responses which deal with the notion of *relative* importance, although they may include intrinsic importance as well; relative importance may refer to the context of each story as a whole (which may vary according to types of significance or story parameters; see section 5.1.2.2 below) or to internal variations of significance within each story. For instance:

[Wr] I that the Spanish Armada's defeat was important but not very. It helped along with other things to weaken Spain as a power. However, it did not completely destroy Spain. Without other causes, Spain may still have been powerful for a long, long time (...) (Stuart., yr 10, En 3, SA Q1).

Therefore, the former two categories work at two levels: a lower one will code those responses for which importance is not an issue; and an intermediate level will code responses which implicitly or explicitly assert the intrinsic significance of an event or process, with no further reference to a context. The final category deals with relative importance, and includes all attempts, implicit or not, to balance importance in the context of the two stories.

## 5.1.2. Attributions of Significance

### 5.1.2.1. Importance

This notion is studied in connection with causal weighting and meaning. Several task items address this issue, particularly SA Q1-Q2, AG Q1-Q2 and SA Q3 (see Appendices V and VI, pp. 306-307 and 319). Beyond general ideas of intrinsic or contextual significance, importance here is evaluated according to its variations in degree and nature as well. This evaluation responds to the following research questions that were already formulated in Chapter 2:

- 1) How far do students see the question of importance as a component of historical causal explanation?
- 2) Do they understand the notion of importance as a way of evaluating events as causes or consequences?
- 3) Do they see the notion of causal primacy as fixed?
- 4) How do students justify the attribution of importance to some facts or conditions?
- 5) To what extent do students associate this notion to the broader concept of significance, in relation to types of attributions and story parameters?

Progression in the broad notion of importance is shown through these categories:

#### CATEGORIES

##### IMPORTANCE

Progression:

1. **Importance is not an issue**
2. **Intrinsic importance:** single significance
3. **Fixed contextual importance (I):** significance is fixed within / across attributions (implicit consequences; short-term significance)
4. **Fixed contextual importance (II):** significance is fixed within / across attributions (explicit consequences; long-term significance)
5. **Variable contextual importance:** significance varies within / across attributions

#### 5.1. Factual

#### 5.2. Criterial



The first category, *Importance is not an issue*, is the same level as the one met in 'Intrinsicality / Contextuality', and addresses the same kind of responses. These overlapping categories allowed the study of students' internal coherence of data across different questions and task-sets<sup>2</sup>.

The second one, *Intrinsic importance: single significance*, codes for responses that see phenomena as having a single and fixed importance; importance is 'given' or 'obvious', attached to the intrinsic significance of the event or process. It corresponds to the category *Intrinsicality: events are only important per se* explained above, but here the process of 'selection' in history is recognized. For these pupils, their justification of importance does not go beyond the general issue of success or conquest, in the case of Alexander's task, for instance,

[Wr] Alexander was important because he created a large empire, people looked up to him (Nagina, yr 8, En 3, AG Q1).

Students whose answers belong to the third category, *Fixed contextual importance (I)*, may speak in terms of contemporaries and short-term causal significance, connecting the event, though very implicitly, to a broader context. These kinds of ideas are categorized at a higher level than mere intrinsicality, as in the example given below:

[Wr] I think that what Alexander did was important because he opened up the world to people, who thought the world was small after he had died... Before he died... he made the world look bigger (Luqman, yr 8, En 1, AG Q1).

In this case, Luqman is assessing events in relation to other events (e.g. the implicit consequences of Alexander's conquests). His notions of success and conquest as an important thing go a little further (e.g. "he opened up the world to people"), but he does not allude directly to concrete far-reaching consequences. Significance for him is fixed within and by context, because there is no mention of any differences in nature or degree of importance between the two stories given in the tasks.

Boundaries between the former category and the fourth one, *Fixed contextual importance (II)*, are set by the explicitness of students' answers with respect to *consequences* or later events, in the latter case. Then importance is clearly seen as a means to evaluate historical events in relation to other occurrences, but it is fixed within and by context, as the previous level was. A typical response could be:

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<sup>2</sup> This is one of several potential investigations made possible by the data, which for reasons of space and time are not pursued in this doctoral study, but which may be taken up subsequently.

[Wr] I think it was important [the Armada's defeat], because thanks to this defeat the English believed that God was on their side, and that boosted them to keep on fighting with greater strength against Spain, and the Spanish stopped having the confidence they used to enjoy and their will to fight, when they believed that they would not be able to defeat their enemy; besides, an economic crisis began (María, yr 12, Sp 1, SA Q1).

The highest category, *Variable contextual importance*, gathers in the notion of contextuality across and within the stories. Importance is evaluated in a different way, according to variations in *nature* and *degree*. Within this category, two subcategories were considered; *Factual* includes those responses that evaluate the variable importance between accounts only in relation to the facts; *Criterial* apply to those answers that offer some kind of criteria to assess importance.

[Wr] What he [Alexander] did was important, because [it] enabled him to show what a good military leader he was, as he was able to expand his empire eastwards. However, I do not think that Alexander influenced the way in which people expanded territories later on, because their motives for doing this are entirely different... [Int] "It's important in one bit, but not in another" (Stephanie, yr 12, En 2, AG Q1).

For Stephanie, the significance of what Alexander did changes if different types of attributions of significance (contemporary or negative causal), or if different story parameters (aspect or time-scale) are considered.

#### 5.1.2.2. Emplotment and Story Parameters

As discussed in Chapter 2, *emplotment* is the operation by which historians shape their facts into a story of a particular kind; events then attain their significance when emplotted in a particular story, and significance may change depending on each plot structure. Different emphasis on some events or processes, characterization and variation of *story parameters* interact to achieve an account of a specific kind. In the adaptation of a theoretical model for our empirical data, three main story parameters (linked to the notion of point of view) are considered: *evaluative tone*, *time-scale* and *aspect* or theme. Task items that aim to explore these concepts are: SA Q1-Q2, AG Q1-Q2 and SA Q8 (see Appendices V and VI, pp. 306, 310-311 and 319). Leading questions from Chapter 2 were re-formulated in order to frame our approach to empirical data:

- 1) To what extent do students employ the idea that the significance of an event may change because that event can be emplotted in different ways?
- 2) Are they aware of the different story parameters on which a historical account may be constructed? Do they notice that variations within parameters across two (possibly) conflicting accounts may affect the significance of an event?
- 3) To what extent do students see historical events as having a direction? How far do they think in terms of patterns of development, such as progress or decline, in historical accounts?

Progression may be shown in the different degree of students' awareness of authorship or of the account's underlying structure in the stories proposed to them, and in the distinction or not of tone, time-scale and aspect in the context of two or more conflicting accounts (given in the research tasks) or of an integrating account (constructed by the student). These ideas are coded as follows:

## CATEGORIES

### EMPLOTMENT

Progression:

1. **No indication of the notion**
2. **Indication of the notion (implicit or explicit)**

### STORY PARAMETERS

Progression:

1. **No sign of conflict between stories:** no reference to differences in story parameters
2. **Awareness of conflict between stories, but differences mentioned in story parameters are other than those related to significance:** (e.g. different words, different aspects, but the significance is the same)
3. **Awareness of conflict between stories in matters of significance according to differences in story parameters**

Variations of responses within these two broad categories are measured according to degree of sophistication (Barca-Oliveira, 1996) in their appreciation of differences between stories, as in responses to Question 2 in both task sets: *Does the Spanish Armada's defeat*

*matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?, or Does what Alexander did matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?*. The first coding for this question aims to build in a hierarchy of responses among those who do not recognize relevant differences at all; those who judge importance to be the same across stories, but add some qualification to their basic judgement, and those who see differences of importance across stories. The following example, from an interview transcript, could be used to illustrate the first kind of responses:

[Int] "Yes, it's both about the Spanish Armada. Unless one is wrong and the other is right, the defeat has to matter the same [Why didn't you write that in the written task?] Because I didn't understand it... [Any other difference?] It is important in both stories; they are different words, but the stories are still the same" (Luqman, yr 8, En 3, SA Q2).

Although puzzled by this question in the written task, in his answer to the interviewer Luqman establishes an idea that will be fitted into our model of progression by stages: differences between stories remain at the level of substantial content; if the event is about the same thing, and it is important, there must be just one way of telling it, and its significance is undoubtedly fixed. As he explicitly asserts: "it has to matter the same". No references to story parameters or to emplotment are shown here, then.

At a higher level, Angela qualifies in the interview what she previously sustained in the script:

[Wr] It matters the same, before the sending of the Armada, Elizabeth feared Philip, but after the defeat, she didn't, and that is more or less what it's told in both stories... // [Int] "In story 1, they talk about what people thought, how their eyes were opened when they lost... In story 1 it is important, but in 2 maybe it is a little bit more important; they talk about all the countries the English conquered. The story is similar, but not exactly the same. They're two different versions" (Angela, yr 8, Sp 3, SA Q2).

In her final response, she refers to something beyond mere content, to differences in aspect --in the way the story is emplotted-- that lead to two "versions" of the same event, a situation that she finds acceptable, unlike Luqman in his case.

Finally, Fred evaluates the importance of the stories firstly by tone and secondly by time-scale, as differences arising from the kind of context in which Alexander's significance is set: a simple forerunner or a great achiever and turning-point character in the process of empire-making (distinctions in types of significance will be treated in detail below):

[Wr] No. He seemed to be more important and influential in Story 2. In Story 1, Alexander is portrayed as merely a forerunner for greater things such as the Roman Empire. In Story 2 he appears to be the original and most influential emperor (Fred, yr 10, En 6, AG Q2).

Through his wording ("Alexander is portrayed..."), this student is recognizing a sense of authorship and narrative structure beneath the stories, which makes him define the significance of Alexander at a different degree in both accounts.

### 5.1.2.3. Point of view

Another key concept for the study of significance in connection to historical interpretation is 'point of view' or in a broader sense, 'perspective', as we argued in Chapter 2. The notion is studied in the following questions from research tasks: SA Q2, AG Q2, SA Q7, AG Q6, and particularly SA Q4-5-6 and AG Q3-4-5 (pp. 306, 308-309, 319-321). It is certainly a polysemic term, both in academic circles and in students' minds. Research tasks were designed as a tool to explore common or variable patterns in pupils' reasoning about how the writing of history works, or whether such an idea of 'history writing' is present in their thinking at all, e.g., in some year 8 students from our sample. In the exploration of history writing the notion of point of view is unavoidable. But what are pupils' ideas about this matter? How can they be classified in a workable hierarchy? These were the research questions we proposed to examine:

How far do students:

- 1) think of historians as holding a particular point of view in their accounts?
- 2) perceive a point of view only as a bias that must be avoided?
- 3) construe historians as being confronted with multiple voices of the past and different historical perspectives, besides the present's perspective?
- 4) have a sense of audience for whom history stories are written?
- 5) think that a 'point of view' in history writing is not only unavoidable, but also necessary?  
Do they think that this necessity arises from the inner consistency of the account?

With these questions in mind, progression in students responses with respect to point of view and significance are coded by means of the following categories:

## CATEGORIES

### POINT OF VIEW

Progression:

1. **No indication of the notion:** issue is seen only as factual
2. **Illegitimate point of view:** historians' personal (interests, likes, dislikes) and social biases (ideology, social background) are seen as partisan
3. **Legitimate point of view:** historians' personal (interests, likes, dislikes) and social biases (ideology, social background); issues of evidence (gaps, problematic interpretations)
4. **Necessary condition in the practice of history:** 'point of view' responds to the logic of the account (e.g. different theories in causal weighting or different attributions of significance)

Not all the questions from the research tasks confront the notion of point of view in the same way, an important consideration when we make comparisons across items and tasks. For example, in some multiple choice items, the idea that historians do take a point of view was implicit in their choice. In SA Q 4 or AG Q3 (see Appendices V and VI, pp. 308 and 320), some of the students' ideas about point of view could be inferred from choices (c) *historians usually take sides* or (e) *historians just think differently from each other*; students making this choice could merely imply an author's perspective or talk about historians' point of view explicitly. However, in open questions such as SA Q2 or AG Q2, students' mention of perspectives or viewpoints is already indicating some ideas about their conceptions of significance in connection with the writing of accounts, different from those responses which overlook the issue.

In the scale of progression above described, the first category *Issue is seen as factual* includes those students who, in general terms, do not indicate any awareness of the concept of point of view in their justifications for choice or answers to open questions.

Intermediate categories *Illegitimate point of view* and *Legitimate point of view* record ideas that already take into account the active role of historians in their writing. Students may consider this role as an irritating, but nevertheless unavoidable, feature of historiography, or they may view it as a distortion of reality. In the latter case, *Legitimate point of view*, partisanship (especially in connection with nationalities) is usually seen as the main reason for exaggeration:

[Wr] The reason I chose (c) *historians usually take sides* is because usually the historians writing about it are on different sides. Therefore [they] are biased about it and bend the truth. // I think both stories are on the same guidelines of the truth but over time have changed to be biased of what army you supported. [Int] "They'll always be biased...You'll have to mix them up a bit and come to see what really happened" (Jonathan, yr 8, En 2, SA Q4-5-6).

[Wr] I don't agree, because some historians tell the facts in a way that their country becomes benefited (Boris, yr 8, Sp 6, AG Q10).

Category *Legitimate point of view* codes for answers that notice the limits of historical knowledge to a certain extent, and consider perspectives as legitimate. Paucity of objectivity may be caused by something else apart from personal biases or social prejudices. Historians' backgrounds always underlie their work, but that does not mean that history is just a heap of lies. On the other hand, the state of available evidence, lack of relevant information for a particular matter or problematic sources may lead to different interpretations based on the point of view taken by the historian,

[Wr] Historians do think differently from each other. Each historian has had a different experience of life and has different beliefs. This will influence the way in which they interpret the evidence and hence there will be differences. [Int] "Both are valid, if they have the arguments to back it up. That's why you can say history is quite solid in that way" (Nanette, yr 12, En 1, SA Q4-5-6).

[Wr] Historians are usually presented with different evidence. This generally gives them different opinions. // I think that historians, unless completely independent, can be biased towards their own country. They may not do this purposefully but the presentation of different evidence usually leads them to be biased. [Int] "They do take sides, but because they think differently; bias sometimes is not really intentional" (Alice, yr 10, En 4, SA Q4-5-6).

*Inescapable point of view* is a common characteristic of history in responses falling into the last category of the model of progression presented above, *Necessary condition in the practice of history*. These responses are categorized at a higher level insofar as they recognize explicitly historians' *intentions* in the construction of their narratives, or see point of view as a *structural*, or 'necessary' condition of historical accounts. For this category Rolf can act as an example, if his generalizable 'you' is substituted by 'the historian', in his answer to the question *How can you decide* (between sentences from competing stories) *which is best?*

[Wr] You could decide which is best by knowing what purpose you have of picking one and not both, or by reading many texts on it and deciding which one you like best. [Int] "You have to know what you are looking for... If you had no purpose, you wouldn't know which one is best" (Rolf, yr 12, En 4, AG Q6).

Here this student establishes particular criteria to decide between interpretations of the significance of a process; point of view depends on the historian's intention when he or she is confronting the sources, it depends on what question the historian is trying to answer. This idea implies a recognition that many value judgements come into the selectivity inherent in the writing of history not necessarily from the social or political ideas of the individual historian (personal or social 'biases', in students' words), but as relational to "macro-historical, medium-range or particular interpretations", if we borrow the classification of Christianson (Christianson, 1991). Hence the higher stage of progression in relation to 'point of view' corresponds to an awareness of the selection of facts according to the structure of the account, rather than to the individual's ideology. If we turn to another example, this time from year 8, the pupil justifies his choice for picking *(d) the sentences answer different questions* [reference to the whole question] by saying:

[Wr] It could have been a setback with dire consequences, but he (Philip) could still be very powerful. One looks at short term, one at long, therefore different questions. [Int] "Both could be truth: 'he still was powerful'... that's an immediate effect; but 'it was a decisive setback', it's a long-term question" (Fraser, yr 8, En 6, SA Q4-5-6).

In this circumstance, Fraser overcomes the possible conflict between sentences, situating them in the wider context of the stories and remaining attentive to the structure of the narrative: significance changes with a short or a long-term perspective, and this is how history usually works.

#### **5.1.2.4. Validity and truth in relation to significance and accounts**

The last issue in understanding students' ideas about the relationship between significance and accounts in history is the question of validity, truth and truthfulness of diverse representations of the past (see Chapter 2, section 2.3). Traditional historians used to take a positivist position to assess conflicting explanations and interpretations: the crux was allegedly resolved by contrasting historical interpretations with the 'facts of the past'. Unfortunately, the notion of fact is much more vague than historians' normal practice seems to reveal. The problem with historical facts and with facts of the past is that they are



constructions and interpretations of the past themselves; evidence is not fact until given meaning in accordance with some framework or perspective (Berkhofer, 1995a). In our *fin de siècle* transitional age, most historians are prone to admit that, although facts are essential to historical interpretations, they are not enough to prove an interpretation. As we discussed in previous chapters, how we can judge what and why is 'true' among competing interpretations of facts is a question that remains open and debatable among historians and philosophers of history. But how do students confront this problem? Basic research questions that may apprehend students' ideas with reference to validity and truth in historical significance are:

- 1) How far do students face the matter of validity and truth of interpretations as relevant to history at all?
- 2) Do they assess differing interpretations by appeal only to facts?
- 3) To what extent do they ponder that facts are not enough to prove interpretations? Do they distinguish criteria for testing facts and interpretations?

Coded data for this set of categories are the responses to items SA Q4-5-6, AG Q3-4-5, SA Q7 and AG Q6 (pp. 308-309 and 320-321). Categorization of empirical data is charted as follows:

## CATEGORIES

### VALIDITY AND TRUTH

Progression:

1. **Factual clash:** The issue of two rival interpretations assessing the significance of an event or process is seen as a factual conflict (or even a contradiction)
  - 1.1. **Responses in this category do not appeal to any kind of criteria for testing validity or truth**
  - 1.2. **Responses in this category may appeal to some kind of criteria:** They only refer back to facts; in any case, interpretation is seen as a disagreement over the facts
2. **Partial / Temporal conflict:** The issue of two rival interpretations is seen as a part / whole conflict or a temporal conflict (i.e. different discrete times in stories). Responses assign some kind of criteria for testing for validity or truth other than simply facts

**3. Aspectual: alternative interpretations:** The relation between two rival interpretations is seen not just as conflicting, but also (or mainly) as alternative or competing (i.e. it is aspectual). Responses in this category explicitly differentiate their criteria for testing facts and interpretations in issues of validity and significance in history

For instance, in one of the items, SA Q7 or AG Q6, pupils read two different interpretations worded in the form of two clashing sentences. When students were asked, "How could you decide which is best?", some of them disregarded the question of method (the 'how' notion) and directly opted for one choice.

[Wr] I think Story 1 is right, because Philip II did not surrender so easily  
(Adrián, yr 8, Sp 4, SA Q7).

Here the issue is viewed as a factual conflict; he makes his choice and rejects the other version. Thus he is testing the validity of interpretations by means of facts only, and with a single allusion to content, not to the way history may be written. His answer would be coded, then, as *Factual clash*.

A higher level corresponds to this second example:

[Wr] To decide which story's quote is best, I would look at Alexander's other achievements and see if they lasted much longer or shorter than his cities. If they lasted longer, then I would say Story 1 is best, or if his other achievements didn't last as long, I would say that Story 2 is best  
(Alice, yr 10, En 4, AG Q6).

For Alice, differences across narratives lie mainly upon the appreciation of distinct moments in time. To make her decision, this student points out the need of further consideration of achievements, so she is setting some kind of criteria by which the conflict might be solved. But these criteria remain within a content level. That is the reason why this kind of answer would be coded as *Partial / Temporal conflict*.

Nonetheless, some students can reach a different level of understanding when they realize that the conflict cannot be fixed by merely contrasting evidence, but by assessing the scope and power of each interpretation, criteria also used for discussing the larger implications of a historian's account. The next example could be categorized as *Aspectual: alternative interpretations*.

[Wr] It would depend on whether you looked at what happened immediately after Alexander's death, or what happens up to the modern day. You could see whether the towns still existed or see if any of his Greek ways carried on in this area despite the collapse of the empire...  
 [Int] "There is a difference in scope... You can't really decide, because they're answer different questions, really. Story 1 says most of the towns, just the buildings physically fell into ruins, it doesn't say anything about their influence" (Clare, yr 12, En 5, AG Q6).

## 5. 2. Types of attributions of significance

In Chapter 2, Section 2.4., the nature of significance was defined by reference to its attributions or sources, which establish the relationship between events and processes in a historical account. Historians start from different viewpoints that emerge from different sources, among which we have determined our classification to satisfy the following research questions:

- 1) Do students see significance in history as fixed or variable? (linked to our first categorization between intrinsicality and contextuality)
- 2) In the case that they see significance as variable, to what extent are they aware of the possible different attributions that may work within a historical account?
- 3) Do they consider that the 'logic of the narrative' obeys different theories of causal weighting and different emphasis on a particular type of significance?

These questions will be answered inferentially through several items from our research tasks: SA Q1-Q2, AG Q1-Q2, SA Q3 and AG Q 7-8-9 (see Appendices V and VI, pp. 306, 308-309 and 319-321). Again, stories and questions in the research tasks should allow students to deal with attributions of significance in different contexts: open queries referred to particular stories, general questions about importance in history, and multiple-choice questions. For each item, students' responses were charted within the following set of categories, in correspondence with the model established for the notion of 'Importance' (see above, p. 108).

## CATEGORIES

### TYPES OF SIGNIFICANCE

Progression:

1. **No allusion to any type of significance**
2. **Intrinsic and single significance**
3. **Fixed contextual significance:** significance is fixed within / across attributions (contemporary and causal only or single significance other than contemporary)
4. **Fixed contextual significance:** significance is fixed within / across attributions (besides or other than contemporary and causal)
5. **Variable contextual significance:** significance varies within / across attributions
  - 5.1. **Contemporary and causal**
  - 5.2. **Besides or other than contemporary and causal**

Each type among all possible attributions of significance is coded according to these specifications:

a) Contemporary significance is treated in students' responses as inclusive, that is to say, anything is considered as such that applies, in general terms, the perspective of people at the time. Therefore, it may include contemporaries' perceptions and feelings, descriptions of personal features of the main historical characters (Alexander, Elizabeth I, and Philip II). For instance:

[Wr] I think Alexander was important, because he conquered a lot of lands, and then he lived many adventures, and knew more countries (Elena, yr 8, Sp 6, AG Q1).

[Wr] I think the Spanish defeat was very important as Philip lost some of his subjects' confidence (...). Philip lost his reputation of being an invincible warrior (Sarah, yr 8, Sp 4, SA Q1).

In cases like these, contemporary significance is clearly associated with intrinsicality, since no other type of attribution is reported. As we will see in our discussion of findings, this characterization will work as a primary marker to define progression through different stages in the distinction of types of attributions of significance. When contemporary

significance is seen in a broader context, responses are also coded for story parameters (aspect, tone, time-scale).

b) *Causal significance* situates an event or process in relation to its causal power; hence its significance is in part dependent on later events or consequences. An awareness of this type always indicates a degree of contextuality in our empirical data. As in the former type, particular features and uses of language may act as rules to systematize data coding. Hints for causal significance are verbs such as 'help', 'make', 'benefit', 'enable', 'change', 'achieve', 'instigate', 'result', 'allow'; expressions such as 'have an influence', 'due to', 'contribute to'; consequential links such as 'therefore', 'so', 'that is why', 'in that way'; use of counterfactuals, etc.

The nature of causal significance may be defined in pupils' answers by aspect (economic, social, political, religious, cultural), geographical space (England, Spain; Greece, Persia) and time-scale (immediate, short-term, long-term).

Causal connections are the most frequently used justifications of importance in our data. For some students it may be the only reference to types of significance, as in these answers:

[Wr] I think the Spanish Armada was important because otherwise the Spanish Empire would have grown and people and countries would lose their individuality; they would be forced to become Catholics despite their beliefs (Charlotte, yr 10, En 4, SA Q1).

[Wr] Yes: in both stories they convey to us what the Spanish lost and shows how it resulted in a decline to the Spanish Empire. Both stories also show that despite the defeat Spain still remains a strong country (Charlotte, yr 10, En 4, SA Q2).

Here the event of the defeat is viewed as the main cause in Question 1, by means of a typical counterfactual argument, and also in Question 2, where the decline of the Spanish Empire is seen as a direct "result" of the defeat, an overall consideration that prevents her from recognizing relevant differences between stories.

More frequently, though, year 10 and year 12 students are attentive to several types of significance in their explanations about the importance of a particular occurrence. We will discuss the matter more extensively in later chapters.

c) *Pattern significance* indicates a higher level of sophistication in students' answers. It is always allied to contextuality, and usually refers to concrete models of emplotment, such

as the concepts of *progress* and *decline*. Markers for data coding within this category are those terms which allude to the event or process as a turning-point or a trend in a developmental account, such as words like 'milestone'; or expressions of the sort like "the world might not be the same way it is now...", "he broadened the horizons...", "he achieved new things...", "he opened up the world", "it was a first step...", "he was ahead of his time..." (in AG tasks); or "it marked the beginning...", "from then on...", "it was the start of...", "since then...", "that way it started..." (in SA tasks). Sometimes, the wording may appear problematic, in the use of terms like 'influence' or 'impact', that could be taken as causal, or phrases such as "it influenced the way people looked at the world..."; these doubts must be habitually solved by reference to each particular context of questions and tasks.

A standard example can be found in Elena's response:

[Wr] I think it was an important defeat, for England as much as for Spain. In the case of Spain, it meant the beginning of the Empire's decline, above all economically, which went on until the XVIII century. For England, it was the beginning of one of its best periods. Not only it [England] improved after the defeat, but also it remained to be a Protestant country and increased its territories (Elena, yr 12, Sp 1, SA Q1).

The defeat is interpreted here as a turning point in both Spanish and English histories, an event that meant the Spanish Empire's decadence and the English rise as a maritime power. Two less clear-cut cases might be the following:

[Wr] The Spanish Armada may have changed things, in my opinion, if it had succeeded. It may have only changed religious beliefs, but now people are independent in their thinking anyway. On the other hand, we could have become and stayed a part of the Spanish Empire. If this had happened, we would not be the powerful country that we are today (Jenny, yr 10, En 4, SA Q1).

[Wr] Yes, because if it [Spain] had not been defeated, it could have conquered England. [Int] "It made Philip lose his empire, it was disintegrating" (Sergio, yr 10, Sp 4, SA Q1).

Does Jenny regard the defeat only as causal, or does she add some clues for considering it as the starting of two trends: a) England's belonging to the Spanish Empire (possible) and b) England's increasing power (real)? Does Sergio see the process of 'disintegration' as a trend that started with the Armada's defeat?

In both excerpts, students do use counterfactual arguments, an indication of causal reasoning. Yet in Jenny's case, the idea of (negative) causal power of the defeat seems to be stronger than in Sergio's example, whereas he appears to locate the defeat in the beginning of a pattern of change, if we look at his interview response. Therefore, Jenny's answer is categorized as causal significance (besides significance for the present and the future) and Sergio's as pattern (besides causal).

d) Symbolic significance may operate from the perspective of people of the past and from the perspectives of subsequent presents; we need then to disentangle this category from other types, like significance for contemporaries or significance for the present and the future. Unlike the latter type, symbolic significance is attached specifically to notions of moral example (lessons from history) and mythical past. It implies a particular 'use of history', related to issues of national identity and partisanship, but it can also be connected to more general or a-historical concepts, such as piety or transcendental moral ideas. In all cases, this type of significance is recognized in both English and Spanish educational systems as one of the distinctive features that make history an essential part of the curriculum.

Through the analysis of students' wording, we can establish markers for data coding. General expressions such as 'it showed', 'it gives an indication...', 'it proved...', 'it highlighted...' usually indicate this type of attribution; it can also be expressed by more definitive terms, such as 'teaches us', 'set a good example for others', 'he was an inspiration for...', 'was a role model...', etc.

Examples taken from both task sets are:

[Wr] The defeat of the Spanish Armada was important in the respect that *it proved* the Spanish could be beaten and the Spanish lost confidence. However, at the same time the Spanish Empire was still too large to be conquered completely (Ian, yr 12, En 2, SA Q1; emphasis added).

[Wr] Yes, because once he built new towns, he could spread the Greek culture from those towns, and *that is good*. Besides, afterwards Napoleon read about him *to follow his example* (Ana, yr 10, Sp 3, AG Q1, emphasis added).

e) Significance for the present and the future is closely related to importance and causal weighting, and only operates in the long-term, when the bond with the future is emphasized. In our data, links will be shown to the category of intrinsicality and to the notion of subjective significance. With respect to the concrete context of research tasks,

empirical data may work at different levels of progression, from a Calvinistic causal logic in the sense of linear endless transmission (Shemilt, 1983) to a contextualized comparison of different presents, that at the same time establishes the effects in psychological terms:

[Wr] I think it is important, because when we lost the countries we had, we had less money and little importance (...) If we had now the countries we had before, Spanish would be spoken more than English and Chinese, and we would be better known (Jorge, yr 8, Sp 2, SA Q1).

[Wr] I think that the Spanish Armada's defeat was a really important part of English and Spanish history. If the Spanish Armada was not defeated, then religion in England would be different now. People would be frightened to be a Protestant (...) (Stephen, yr 10, En 5, SA Q1).

[Wr] I think it was important and that it did matter. What Alexander achieved was an amazing feat over such a large area... The idea of such a large empire at that time is amazing, before that of Rome, and also of such a military success... We still think he's quite a big figure today (Liz, yr 12, En 6, AG Q1).

This attribution of significance is also one definitely recognized by all European educational systems as indispensable in the history curriculum. Showing explicitly possible attachments between school disciplines and students' reality is one of the keys for motivation to learning.

The conceptual framework described above will be applied in the next two chapters, where major findings and results will be discussed quantitatively and qualitatively; Chapter 6 corresponds to the categorization of empirical data according to the relationship students saw between significance and accounts in history; Chapter 7 deals with the specific types of attributions of significance they indicated.



## 6. SIGNIFICANCE AND ACCOUNTS

### 6.0. Introduction

In this chapter, students' notions of significance will be analyzed in relation to historical accounts. Different conceptual clusters, already delineated in the previous chapter, will frame both analysis and discussion of findings in this one. The first two conceptual clusters, or main categories, are the dyad 'Intrinsicality / Contextuality' and 'Importance'; students' ideas framed in these categories will be explored mainly through Questions 1 and 2 from our two task-sets, the Spanish Armada (SA) and Alexander the Great (AG), and Question 3 from the Spanish Armada set. The third broad category, 'Emplotment and Story Parameters', will be examined through students' responses to Questions 2 from both task-sets and 8 from the Armada set. Pupils' understanding of 'Point of View', the fourth cluster, will be analyzed through Question 2 in both sets, Questions 4-5-6-7 and 9 from the Armada and Questions 3-4-5-6 from Alexander. The last broad category, 'Validity and Truth' is studied through Question 7 from the Armada and Question 6 from Alexander (see Appendices V and VI, pp. 306-313 and 319-321).

### 6.1 Intrinsicality / Contextuality

As indicated in Chapter 5, this cluster aims to explore students' ideas about significance in relation to historical accounts in a very general sense. To what extent do they think that things in history can be evaluated in isolation (intrinsicality) or, beyond that, with reference to a wider context (contextuality)? The meaning of a historical event or process is a movement away from the local and the particular toward a larger perspective (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.1); the purpose of this movement is to link the event to something that is both intelligible and important (Martin, 1998), and this is made by means of a narrative. How far are students aware of this intimate relationship between significance and narrative (or accounts)?

## LEVELS OF PROGRESSION:

- **LEVEL 1: Importance is not an issue**
- **LEVEL 2: Intrinsicity: events are only important per se**
- **LEVEL 3: Contextuality: events are important / acquire significance in the context of an account**

The data classified in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 represent the proportion of responses per age group and country, England (En) and Spain (Sp), which are allocated to categories of the dual notion of intrinsicity or contextuality in relation to significance and accounts. Data were obtained from responses to Questions 1 and 2 in both task-sets, the Spanish Armada (SA) and Alexander the Great (AG). Question 1 (*Some historians think that the Spanish Armada's defeat / what Alexander did was really important; others think it wasn't. What do you think? Was it important or not? Explain why it mattered or why it did not matter*) aimed to study pupils' ideas in response to an open question regarding the significance of a historical event or process. Question 2 (*Does the Spanish Armada's defeat / what Alexander did matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?*) was a semi-open question that addressed directly the possible conflicting nature of two accounts, with regard to the significance of a historical event or process.

Progression is detected across year groups in each country, England (En) and Spain (Sp). Almost the totality of year 12 students in both countries lies under the broad category of 'Contextuality', and this applies to both questions. Among year 10 students, a minority of answers, particularly from Spanish students, are indexed as 'Intrinsicity', whereas two students from year 10 are the only cases that fall under category 'Importance is not an issue': a Spanish one in Question 1, and an English one in Question 2. In year 8, a greater variability of answers across subcategories is reported; although slightly more than half of year 8 responses are allocated under 'Contextuality', almost half of them consider significance only in intrinsic terms.

Responses across questions appear to be fairly consistent, data are spread very similarly with respect to the comparison across categories, age groups and countries. There is a very similar evolution of responses in year 10 and 12 in both tasks and questions, whereas greater variability is shown in year 8 in all cases. In Question 1, an open question, younger Spanish students respond at lower levels in the Alexander task than in the Spanish Armada; the younger English perform at similar levels in both tasks. In Question 2, when they are offered a choice, the Spanish perform at higher levels in the Armada task than in the Alexander task.

**TABLE 6.1. Intrinsicality / Contextuality:** Number of responses for each level of progression by year group, country and task in Question 1.

<b><u>Question 1</u></b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>SA</b>	2	3	5	1	1	2	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	3	3	<b>6</b>	1	2	<b>3</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>SA</b>	5	9	14	0	2	2	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	7	14	21	1	5	6	0	2	2
	<b>TOTAL</b>	12	23	<b>35</b>	1	7	<b>8</b>	0	2	<b>2</b>
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>SA</b>	16	12	28	23	21	44	24	24	48
	<b>AG</b>	17	10	27	23	18	41	24	22	46
	<b>TOTAL</b>	33	22	<b>55</b>	46	39	<b>85</b>	48	46	<b>94</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

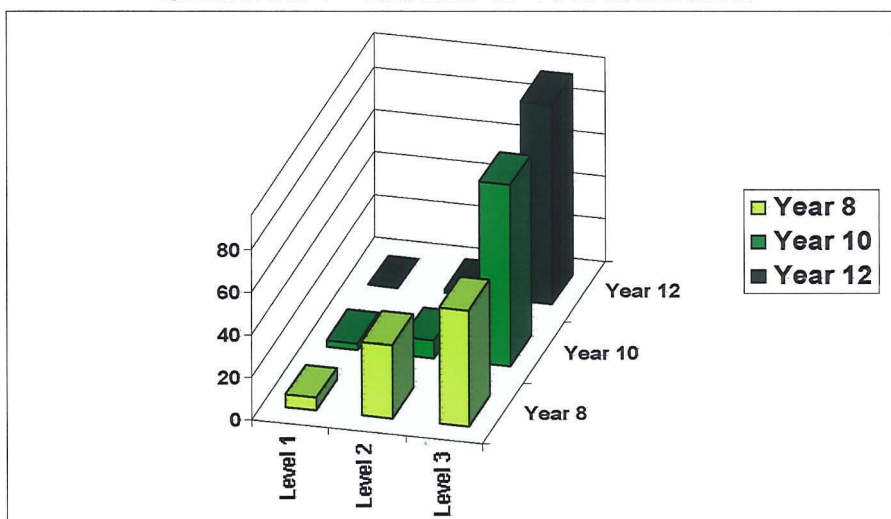
**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

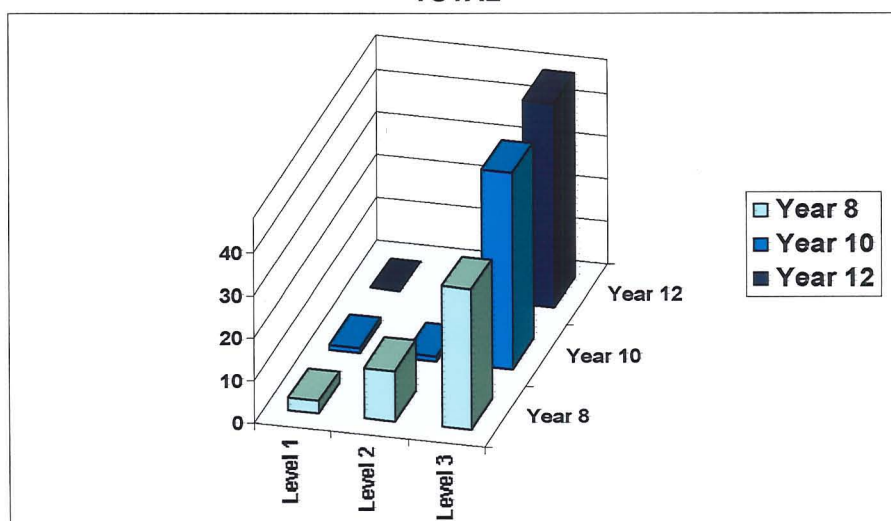
**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**Σ TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

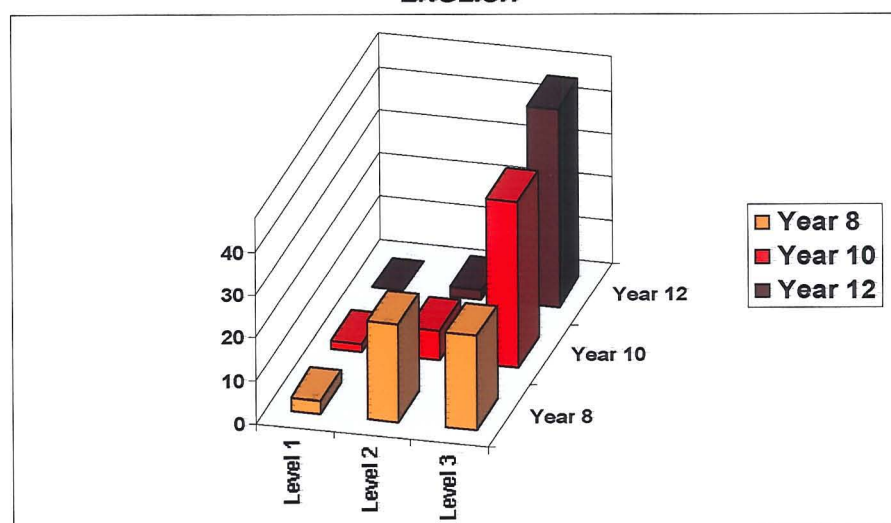
**GRAPH 6.1 (TABLE 6.1) INTRINSICALITY/CONTEXTUALITY  
QUESTION 1 – LEVELS OF PROGRESSION**



**TOTAL**



**ENGLISH**



**SPANISH**

**TABLE 6.2. Intrinsicality / Contextuality:** Number of responses for each level of progression by year group, country and task in Question 2

<b><u>Question 2</u></b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>SA</b>	2	4	6	1	0	1	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	3	6	<b>9</b>	1	0	<b>1</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>SA</b>	15	9	24	0	5	5	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	7	7	14	5	4	9	1	3	4
	<b>TOTAL</b>	22	16	<b>38</b>	5	9	<b>14</b>	1	3	<b>4</b>
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>SA</b>	7	11	18	23	19	42	24	24	48
	<b>AG</b>	16	15	31	19	20	39	23	21	44
	<b>TOTAL</b>	23	26	<b>49</b>	42	39	<b>81</b>	47	45	<b>92</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**Σ TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

Nevertheless, there is a considerable degree of internal variation among the categories at second and third levels ('Intrinsicality' and 'Contextuality', which correspond respectively to 'Intrinsic importance' and 'Fixed contextual importance' in the next section), arising from the fact of the unbalanced number of responses that pertain to each category (very small numbers in 'Intrinsicality' and very large in 'Contextuality'). Thus a more detailed analysis of particular cases is needed for a better understanding of the development of student's ideas within and across each category. Specific examples which have been allocated to each category will be discussed, across countries, task-sets (SA and AG) and questions (1 and 2), in next section about 'Importance'.

## 6.2. Importance

### 6.2.1. Model of progression

The notions of 'intrinsicity' and 'contextuality' allowed us to start the definition of a model of progression, which would be developed after the study of diverse explanatory and interpretive concepts and the distinction between types of significance. If we compare this level-scale (below) to the one defined in the section about 'Intrinsicity and contextuality', we appreciate that the first two levels are mutually correspondent, whereas the third level, 'Contextuality', has been broken down into three (Levels 3 to 5) in this section. To understand how empirical data fit into this theoretical model, we will analyze, cross-sectionally and cross-culturally, some concrete responses to different items in our two research tasks.

The notion of 'importance' is related here to causal weighting and meaning; it goes beyond general ideas of intrinsic or contextual significance, because importance is studied here according to its variations in degree and nature. Progression in students' ideas is detected from responses that indicate no awareness of the notion of importance in historical matters (Level 1) to responses that establish some kind of criteria to assess importance in different contexts (Level 5.2).

This model is constructed along the following levels of progression:

- **LEVEL 1: Importance is not an issue.** No indication of this notion
- **LEVEL 2: Intrinsic importance: single significance.** Events and processes have only an intrinsic importance and significance is fixed regardless of the context
- **LEVEL 3: Fixed contextual importance; significance is fixed between accounts (but may be variable within attributions; implicit consequences; short-term significance).** No recognition of conflict between stories (in Question 1); besides, only contemporary or causal (immediate or short-term consequences) types of significance are recognized
- **LEVEL 4: Fixed contextual importance; significance is fixed between accounts (but may be variable within attributions; explicit consequences; long-term significance).** No recognition of conflict between stories (in Question 1); besides, distinction of different types of attributions of significance

- **LEVEL 5: Variable contextual importance; significance varies both between accounts and within attributions.** Recognition of conflict between stories (in Question 1); distinction of different types of attributions of significance, within or across stories

**5.1:** conflict between stories is seen as **factual**

**5.2:** conflict between stories is seen as **critical**

### 6.2.2. Levels of progression in the notion of importance: quantitative study

Once the empirical bases for our model of progression with reference to the notion of importance have been examined, a quantitative approach is needed to define students' general trends corresponding to each level of progression. Graph 6.2, Tables 6.3. and 6.4 indicate the frequency of students' responses by level in each task and country.

In view of this distribution, the following patterns can be discerned (according to Question 1):

- a) Level 1 ('Importance is not an issue') ranks fifth in all year groups, and it is represented by a tiny minority of students (three Spanish and one English) in year 8, one student in year 10 (Spanish) and no one in year 12. Therefore, the notion of importance as relevant to history is recognized by almost all the students in the sample.
- b) Level 2 ('Intrinsic importance: single significance') ranks first in year 8, and fourth in year 10 and year 12. Half of the year-8 pupils fall into this level, which means an awareness of the intrinsic importance of events, but a lack of recognition of those events in a historical context, either substantive or structural. The proportion is higher among Spanish in all year groups and in the Alexander task set.
- c) Level 3 ('Fixed contextual importance: significance is fixed within / across attributions; implicit consequences; short-term significance') ranks third in all three year groups. Little difference among the distribution by countries is observed, except in a slightly higher proportion of Spanish students in year 10.

**TABLE 6.3. Importance:** Number of responses for each level of progression by year group, country and task in Question 1 (*Some historians think that the Spanish Armada's defeat / what Alexander did was really important; others think it wasn't. What do you think? Was it important or not? Explain why it mattered or why it did not matter*).

<b>Question 1</b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>SA</b>	2	3	5	1	1	2	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	3	3	<b>6</b>	1	2	<b>3</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>SA</b>	5	9	14	0	2	2	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	7	14	21	1	5	6	0	2	2
	<b>TOTAL</b>	12	23	<b>35</b>	1	7	<b>8</b>	0	2	<b>2</b>
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>SA</b>	5	3	8	4	6	10	3	1	4
	<b>AG</b>	6	3	9	2	8	10	1	3	4
	<b>TOTAL</b>	11	6	<b>17</b>	6	14	<b>20</b>	4	4	<b>8</b>
<b>Level 4</b>	<b>SA</b>	8	6	14	14	12	26	13	11	24
	<b>AG</b>	7	4	11	12	5	17	12	13	25
	<b>TOTAL</b>	15	10	<b>25</b>	26	17	<b>43</b>	25	24	<b>49</b>
<b>Level 5</b>	<b>SA</b>	3	3	6	5	3	8	8	12	20
	<b>AG</b>	4	3	7	9	5	14	11	6	17
	<b>TOTAL</b>	7	6	<b>13</b>	14	8	<b>22</b>	19	18	<b>37</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

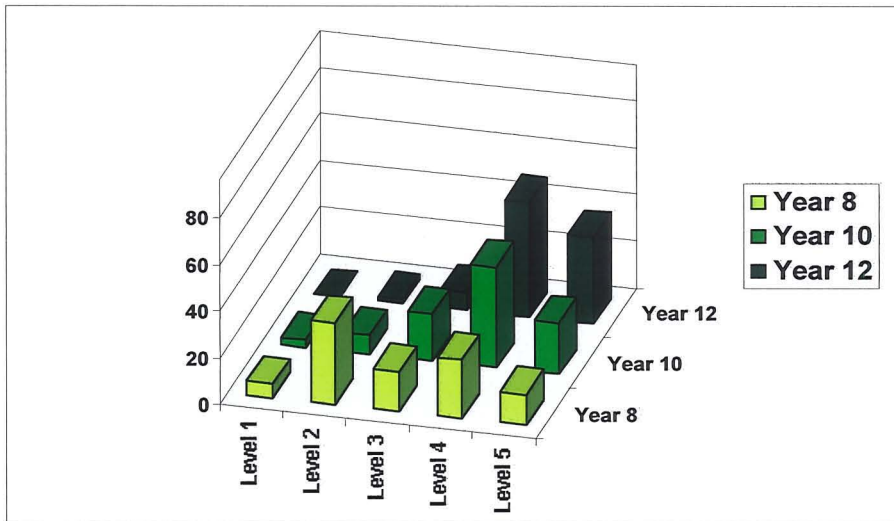
**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

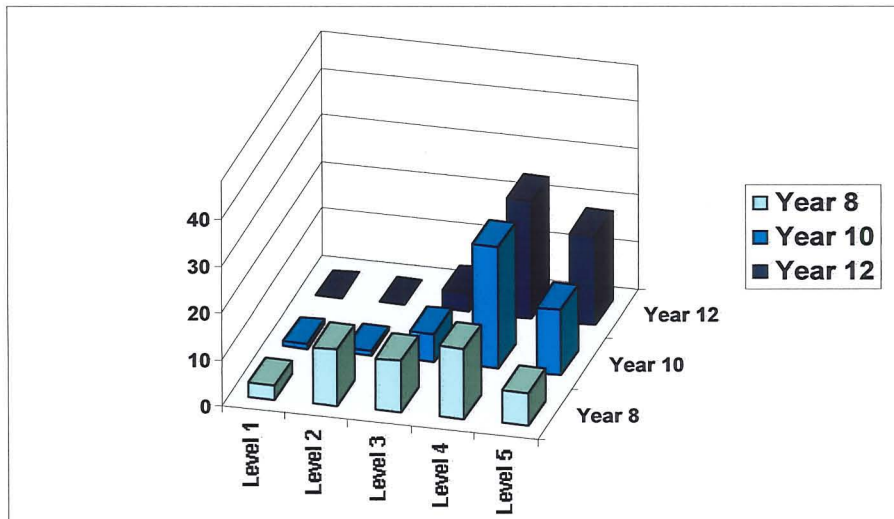
**Σ TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)



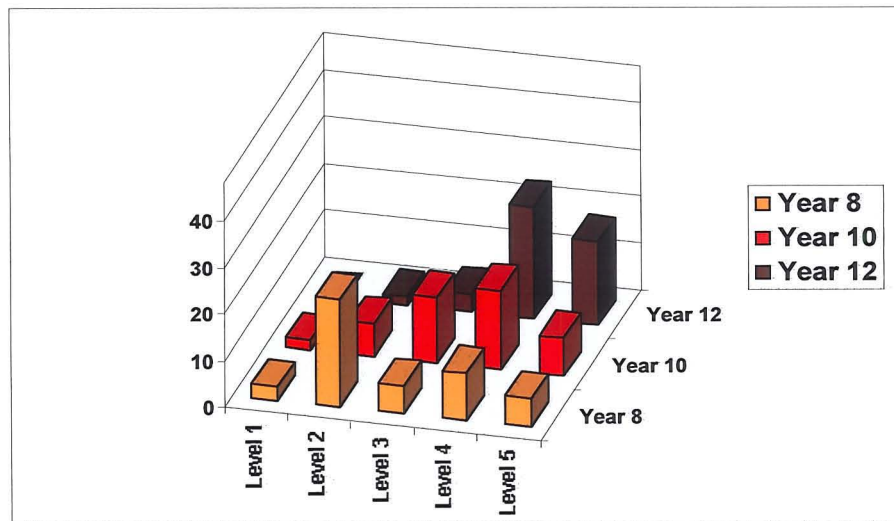
**GRAPH 6.2 (TABLE 6.3) IMPORTANCE  
QUESTION 1 – LEVELS OF PROGRESSION**



**TOTAL**



**ENGLISH**



**SPANISH**

**TABLE 6.4. Importance:** Level 5, stage 5.2. Number of responses by year group, country and task in Question 1 (*Some historians think that the Spanish Armada's defeat / what Alexander did was really important; others think it wasn't. What do you think? Was it important or not? Explain why it mattered or why it did not matter*).

<b>Question 1</b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Level 5 (5.2) criterial</b>	<b>SA</b>	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	5	8
	<b>AG</b>	0	0	0	2	0	2	4	1	5
	<b>TOTAL</b>	1	0	<b>1</b>	2	0	<b>2</b>	7	6	<b>13</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**Σ TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

d) Level 4 ('Fixed contextual importance: significance is fixed within / across attributions; explicit consequences; long-term significance') ranks first in year 10 and year 12, and second in year 8. This level codes for responses that include all types of significance in the long term, including causal<sup>1</sup>. Half of year 10 and more than half of year 12 pupils are classified under this level. In all year groups, the English are better represented than the Spanish students at this level are, but this difference is clearer in year 10.

e) Level 5 ('Variable contextual importance; significance varies within / across attributions') ranks second among year 10 and year 12 students, in a greater proportion for the latter, and fourth among year 8 ones. In Table 6.3, levels 5.1 ('conflict between stories is seen as factual') and 5.2 ('conflict between stories is seen as criterial') are conflated into Level 5. The distribution of responses corresponding to the highest level, 5.2, is shown in

<sup>1</sup> This is the reason for the differences of frequencies in Level 3 and Level 4 in the model of progression for types of significance, in which Level 4 includes only pattern, symbolic and 'connection with the present' types, excluding all kinds of causal attribution (see Chapter 7, section 7.1, p. 183). In that model, Level 3 ranks third for year-8 students.

Table 6.4. At this level, English students are better represented in all year groups and tasks except in Spanish year 12 in the Armada's task-set. In Spain, only students from year 12 are allocated here; in England, students from all year groups are represented.

Multidimensional frequency analysis in an overall test of independence shows that the three variables *level*, *year* and *country* are not mutually independent and some combination of variables is affecting the results (Chi square ( $X^2$ )=6.45, df=8). Looking at the figures in Table 6.3, the two variables which seem to affect the results most are level and year ( $X^2$ =79.3, df=8). The pattern of frequencies across the diagonal from left to right is quite clear; e.g. year 8 is heavily weighted for level 2 and 3, year 10 for level 4 and year 12 for levels 4 and 5. In general, progression towards higher sets of ideas seems to occur at earlier stages in English students than in Spanish ones. This was validated by statistical analysis. The interaction between Level and country was highly significant ( $X^2$ =14.7, df=4,  $p<0.01$ ). A  $X^2$  analysis of data grouped by year was performed to distinguish if this interaction could be assigned to differences at distinct age levels. This is presented in Table 6.5. It shows a significant association between level and country in the case of year 10 ( $X^2$ =11.55, df=4,  $p<0.05$ ). For this year, English students reach higher levels of progression than Spanish ones. This appreciation will be confirmed by the results obtained in other notions linked to importance such as point of view or validity.

**TABLE 6.5.** Importance:  $X^2$  analysis by year group in Question 1.

Level vs. Country	Yr 8	Yr 10	Yr 12
$X^2$	6	11.55	0.45
p		* < 0.05	

For Question 2 (semi-open structure, see Table 6.6), the distribution of responses at Level 1 and Level 2 was similar to Question 1 (open structure), if we follow the data from Table 6.6. At higher levels, though, all students gain a richer understanding of the notion of importance when the question addresses directly the issue of two rival contexts. At Level 3, this is especially the case with the older ones. More dramatically, at Level 5, two thirds of year 12s, more than half of year 10s and a third of year 8 are allocated in the highest category (see also Chapter 7, section 7.1, p. 183). The impact of the kind of question proposed is clearly detected here; deeper insights can be reached in the evaluation of importance if students are compelled to make comparisons themselves.

**TABLE 6.6. Importance:** Number of responses for each level of progression by year group, country and task in Question 2 (*Does the Spanish Armada's defeat / what Alexander did matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?*)

<b>Question 2</b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>SA</b>	2	4	6	1	0	1	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	3	6	9	1	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>SA</b>	15	9	24	0	5	5	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	7	7	14	5	4	9	1	3	4
	<b>TOTAL</b>	22	16	38	5	9	14	1	3	4
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>SA</b>	0	2	2	6	7	13	6	3	9
	<b>AG</b>	12	6	18	3	6	9	5	4	9
	<b>TOTAL</b>	12	8	20	9	13	22	11	7	18
<b>Level 4</b>	<b>SA</b>	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Level 5</b>	<b>SA</b>	7	8	15	16	12	28	18	21	39
	<b>AG</b>	3	9	12	16	14	30	18	17	35
	<b>TOTAL</b>	10	17	27	32	26	58	36	38	74

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**Σ TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

### 6.2.3. Levels of progression in the notion of importance: examples

#### LEVEL 1: Importance is not an issue

At this level, importance seems to be a 'non-concept', or a puzzling one. Given a particular historical account, the very notion of something being important or not seems to be unrecognized. It is possible that this tendency may be associated with lack of experience of teaching that addresses such matters, as is probably the case of some Spanish year 8 students from our sample (see Chapter 1, section 1.2). At worst, problems of general comprehension might be accompanied by low levels of language competence and cognitive immaturity. At best, history may be identified with 'what happened in the past', once and forever; issues of assessment and evaluation of the way history works may have never been confronted by some of our participants.

A good example of students at this level is Cristina, who reproduces the opening of the stories, then grinds to a halt. In her answers to Questions 1 and 2 about the Spanish Armada, she says:

[Wr] Yes it was important. Before the sending of the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth feared the power of Philip. He could help the English Catholics. After the Armada's defeat in 1588 [she stops here] [Int] "That bit about Philip II, about helping England... Holland... I don't remember" (Cristina, yr 8, Sp 3, SA Q1).

[Wr] Before the sending of the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth feared the power of Philip. Philip had to face English attacks on his merchant ships. 1588, Philip sent an Armada against England, but he couldn't send it. [Int] "In story one it says different things... In story 2 there is a better done summary..." (Cristina, yr 8, Sp 3, SA Q2).

What she seems to be doing here is copying out, almost literally, the first sentences from different paragraphs in the stories. When confronted with the possible clash between the two accounts, she appreciates some differences in content, but she does not mention differences in importance. A similar approach is followed by another student allocated in this level:

[Wr] No, Story 2 started talking about Britain's inventions helping industrial goods. [Int] "It's more important in Story 1, because they're saying all the details about the Armada... In Story 2, they don't really talk about the Armada, but about British inventions" (Darren, yr 8, En 6, SA Q2).

Darren does not seem to refer to differences in importance, but to differences of information or "details" between stories: they are *about* different things<sup>2</sup> (the question of *aboutness* will be examined in section 6.3, 'Emplotment and story parameters').

## LEVEL 2: Intrinsic importance: single significance

Among some students at this level, importance may still be a puzzling concept in history. History is understood as the past, and the past is everything. It is not just big events or outstanding people that matter in history, but ordinary people's lives as well. This idea seems to be better represented among English students, although more systematic collection of data that directly addresses this matter is needed, if it is to be properly investigated. It might be characterized by this English student:

[Wr] I think the most important thing about history is that people understand how people felt, for example, how Holland felt being under Spanish rule and then, gradually, not being under them (Sophie, yr 8, En 4, SA, Q3).

What is implied underneath this kind of response is in itself very important, because it would represent an important change since Shemilt's *Evaluation Study* (Shemilt, 1980), and it would mean, as could be expected, a bigger influence of the principles of the *new history* in English than in Spanish history education<sup>3</sup>. But, as it is said above, more data are needed to make a sustained assertion.

On the other hand, for the majority of students at this level the importance of events may be assessed, but not in connection with other events or consequences. There is either a lack of recognition of the idea of 'selectiveness' in history, or the assumption that we study only what is important, therefore, selection is taken for granted (or even 'given'), and history is viewed as the unproblematic description of occurrences in chronological order. Intrinsic importance is usually associated to the contemporary type of significance. Events are important per se, so significance is attached to events intrinsically, in a fixed way. 'Real' history is distinguished from fictional stories in its consideration of an absolute significance: if there is only one relevant history, then each event is significant in one only way.

The following examples illustrate these ideas:

[Wr] I actually think it is. It was important to the Greeks because he was their king. I think everything that happens in history is important for

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<sup>2</sup> 'About' here does not translate into differences in *themes*.

<sup>3</sup> The idea of 'empathy' here couched in the language of 'feelings' is evident.

whatever reason. [Int] "He was their king at the time. Like when Princess Diana died, or the Spanish Armada and the Tudors... *everything in history is important*" (Eve, yr 8, En 5, AG, Q1, emphasis added).

[Wr] It was important, because it is a historical fact between Catholics and Protestants, and because there was a war between England and Spain, because of some conquests of lands (Ismael, yr 10, Sp 5, SA Q1).

[Wr] Yes, it is important, like many other figures, each one did something and this one, for instance, built more than seventy new towns and invaded a lot of lands (Raquel, yr 12, Sp 2, AG Q1).

[Wr] Yes [it matters the same in both stories], because both stories say what he conquered and invaded, and I think no one emphasizes one thing over another. [Int] "Both say the same, although story 2 gives more data than story 1" (Raquel, yr 12, Sp 2, AG Q2).

Eve situates Alexander in his intrinsic importance only; it was something inherent in his royalty, she seems to imply. Ismael evaluates the importance of the Armada's defeat in the 'fact' that it was a war, but he does not refer to further events or consequences. Raquel assesses Alexander's significance in very general terms in both questions, alluding to the 'obvious' importance of the invasion and conquest. The idea that 'we study all that is important' may be implicit there; otherwise, what is the point of doing history? The main feature that unifies responses of this kind is, therefore, the idea of intrinsicity.

**LEVEL 3: Fixed contextual importance; significance is fixed between accounts (but may be variable within attributions; implicit consequences; short-term significance)**

In this level, the importance of a historical event or process is contextual, that is, it is evaluated in relation to its context, but it is 'fixed' insofar as no distinction is made across the two different accounts presented in the research tasks. Importance at this level is always associated with contemporary and/or causal types of significance. Level 3 and Level 4 responses in this model assume that 'importance' is a way of assessing occurrences in history, and it is recognized that these must be related to other occurrences or 'consequences' (broadly speaking). But Level 3 sees that relationship in implicit terms, and it does not evaluate significance in the long run. In the following examples, we can see that immediate or short-term consequences are the only ones that count. Moreover, the consequences are almost embedded in the actions, and the actions are (in some cases) described in terms of their consequences; in this view, the issue is not 'Alexander did *x* and achieved *y*', but 'Alexander did *y*' (Lee, personal communication).

[Wr] I think that what Alexander did was really important. He made people equal and gave them a better look on life. He started a chain of silver coins for selling and buying. This was a very good idea. [Int] "He made people see in different ways that people were the same" (Sarah, yr 8, En 4, AG Q1).

[Wr] It was important, because Philip lost his subjects' confidence and Holland turned against the Spanish; besides, the English conquered lands in North America that the Spanish had ignored (Adrián, yr 8, En 4, SA Q1).

The issue of importance is attached to the very ideas of a defeat or of a conquest, but these pupils assume implicit results, or they think it affected a lot of people. The difficulty in the allocation of responses under this level is the slippery question of implicitness, because to what extent may the researcher be reading too much in her interpretation of students' words? Take the case of Marta, for instance.

[Wr] I think it was important, because they didn't reach the objective they wanted and this had an influence on the Spanish reputation and it made those who wanted independence have more confidence in themselves (Marta, yr 10, Sp 1, SA Q1).

Is importance fixed within the context of short-term or long-term consequences? Does she locate the causal force of the defeat as an immediate reaction or in a pattern of change? Finally, this response was classified as 'Level 3', on the grounds that the evidence for consideration of long-term consequences was not clear. However, the need to find a more solid criterion to define the limits of level 3 and level 4 other than the concepts of implicitness / explicitness associated to consequences would lead to a redefinition of this model together with types of significance, as is mentioned below (Level 4) and is explained in Chapter 7 (see p. 182).

**LEVEL 4: Fixed contextual importance; significance is fixed between accounts (but may be variable within attributions; explicit consequences; long-term significance)**

Importance is related to a context of after events, at this level, and it is fixed because (as in Level 3) no attempt is made to differentiate across accounts. Importance is, then, attached to consequences, results or influences in the long term. It may be associated with a variety of types of significance, other than contemporary and causal, such as pattern, symbolic or significance for the present and the future. There is a recognition that events may have



different significances in different courses of events, but there is no explicit reference to that distinction across accounts (in Question 1). Thomas and Nieves fall into this level:

[Wr] I believe that the defeat of the Armada was important, since it was the first time that Spain's Armada had suffered a major defeat, and now they were no longer the 'invincible warriors', it was the beginning of the end of Spain's empire. The defeat was important as a stepping stone for the breakdown of the empire, and encouraged others to believe it was possible to defeat the Spanish (e.g. the Dutch). [Int] "It was only the first event, that set others in motion... for Philip... it was the first step that breaks up the empire... [it was] hard to keep hold of the empire" (Thomas, yr 12, En 5, SA Q1).

[Wr] I think it was important, because he did not only want to conquer, but also to open up new horizons towards new cultures. I believe that he searched for a racial equality, and it seems strange to me that, so long ago, someone had such an open mind. [Int] "Yes, he tried to make a union of all races, a cultural union... and to expand economically... I think that is rather important... to start new routes, before Christ... I don't know, it seems extraordinary to me, indeed" (Nieves, yr 12, En 5, AG Q1).

Thomas analyzes the defeat's importance in relation to the contemporaries' time ("now they were no longer the 'invincible warriors'..."), but also in a long-term frame, as a turning-point in a pattern of change ("a stepping stone for the breakdown of the empire"), and in connection with symbolic notions ("encouraged others to believe..."). Nieves assumes the same degree of importance for both accounts, but explains her assessment according to different attributions of significance: contemporary, causal and pattern (See Chapter 7 for types of significance).

#### **LEVEL 5: Variable contextual importance; significance varies both between accounts and within attributions**

At this level, significance is seen as variable *within* each attribution (e.g., different aspect, time scale, national group) and *across* each attribution (e.g., when causal connections are mentioned in one account and pattern notions in the second account). Different voices in the past (Berkhofer, 1995) are recognized; different perspectives are noticed.

At 5.1, these variations operate in *factual* terms. The clash between stories is viewed with reference to the content:

[Wr] It was important in different ways to different people. For Elizabeth  
I it was a decisive victory, giving her more prestige in England, and

meant that Protestantism was more secure. For the Dutch, the defeat of the power they were fighting against by their ally was important, it showed Philip that their supporters were a force to be reckoned with, I don't however think that it was a decisive reason for their independence of 1648. For Philip, it showed his subjects that he was weak so he lost their confidence, it could also have been seen as a triumph of Protestantism over Philip's Catholicism --another negative aspect for Philip. It was not important as Philip did not lose land, the Dutch gained no real (material) gains and in England, the Queen still faced threats from Philip after 1588 (Liz, yr 12, En 6, SA Q1).

In Liz's answer, the rub lies in the first sentence: "It was important in different ways to different people"; she makes distinctions between types of attributions and degrees of importance within and across types; in two particular instances, Philip and Holland, the defeat was important for Philip in the short term and in one aspect (loss of confidence), but it was not important for Philip as a powerful ruler on a wider scale; on the other hand, it had a symbolic, rather than a causal significance for Holland. Liz situates both national perspectives in a broader context, but her analysis does not go beyond a 'content' point of view. Maite offers a similar position, in her attempt to balance the accounts' conflicting views:

[Wr] I think he [Alexander] became important, because after conquering those territories he got to expand the Greek culture over more lands, and Greece also met other cultures, different from its own. [Int] "Yes and no. It was important because the Greek culture reached other countries, and that of the Persians reached Greece. But in the end, it declined" (Maite, yr 10, Sp 5, AG Q1).

Alexander's significance is seen in contemporary and causal terms, and the latter is assessed differently when looking at immediate implications or at the long term; the conflict between accounts is considered at the factual level, as the reciprocal transmission of cultures and their final decay.

At 5.2, that clash is referred not --or not only-- to substantive content, but also to *the way both stories are written*. The definition of this higher stage is grounded in the notion of the conflict as *criterial* (Lee and Ashby, 1998):

[Wr] In some ways, what Alexander achieved was very important, attempting to base his empire on racial equality, and in inspiring loyalty by sharing the danger of his troops. In this way, he posed an example that subsequent leaders could look to. In other ways, it did not matter. It could be said that what he did achieve little other than bloodshed in the various

wars, and taught later leaders that land was all-important. [Int] "It could be looked at from two different points of view, mainly... In the ways in which he opened up the world, well, past world, and started new trading... that was fairly important, but other things... are not that important..." (Alice, yr 10, En 6, AG Q1).

Alice constructs an integrating account from the given sources, and offers ways to play down the competition between accounts; she states negative and positive issues, introduces the notion of 'point of view' and accepts both as legitimate.

### 6.3. Emplotment and story parameters

#### 6.3.1. Emplotment: quantitative and qualitative analyses

The notion of 'emplotment' was defined in Chapter 5 (p. 110) as the encodation of facts in specific kinds of 'plot' structures; the significance of an event depends on the plot or the story in which that event is told (through that process, the 'event' is turned into 'fact'). The notion of emplotment operates in this research upon the basis of responses to Question 2 (*Does the Spanish Armada's defeat / what Alexander did matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?*) in both task-sets, and was designed, as discussed in Chapter 3, to explore students' ideas about interpretations in history, from the focus of significance. Through students' treatment of the clash between the two stories, in which emplotment and story parameters differ, we can further study the extent to which they see the significance of an event as fixed or variable, and whether they think in terms of particular 'plots' in history, such as progress and decline, or success and failure, when facing problems of historical significance. Two levels of progression were established to classify pupils' answers. Level 2 codifies for those explanations in which there is a sense of authorship -- beyond the facts--, or some allusion to the structure of the accounts, either implicit or explicit. Level 1 charts those responses that show no indication of the notion of emplotment.

- **LEVEL 1: No indication of the notion**
- **LEVEL 2: Indication of the notion (implicit or explicit)**

Table 6.7 indicates a distinct progression through year groups. The majority of responses from year 8 correspond to Level 1, whereas the majority of older students' responses fall into Level 2. Responses from year 10 are almost equally distributed in both levels. Level 2 includes those explanations which directly allude to some particular patterns of development, such as 'progress' or 'decline'; this allusion was considered as a higher degree of sophistication within internal variations of level. Cross-cultural contrast in the distribution of responses by level is not considerable in the extremes of age groups, years 8 and 12. However, in year 10 English students tended to respond at a higher level than Spanish in both task-sets.

**TABLE 6.7.** Allusion to emplotment by levels of progression

<b>Question 2</b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>SA</b>	22	19	41	8	14	22	5	5	10
	<b>AG</b>	22	21	43	11	19	30	5	7	12
	<b>TOTAL</b>	44	40	<b>84</b>	19	33	<b>52</b>	10	12	<b>22</b>
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>SA</b>	2	5	7	16	10	26	19	19	38
	<b>AG</b>	2	3	5	13	5	18	19	17	36
	<b>TOTAL</b>	4	8	<b>12</b>	29	15	<b>44</b>	38	36	<b>74</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

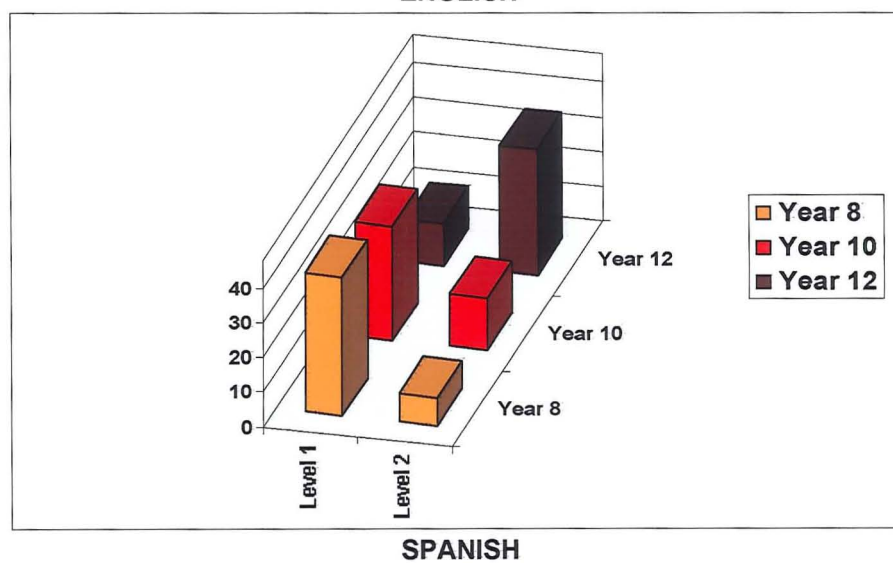
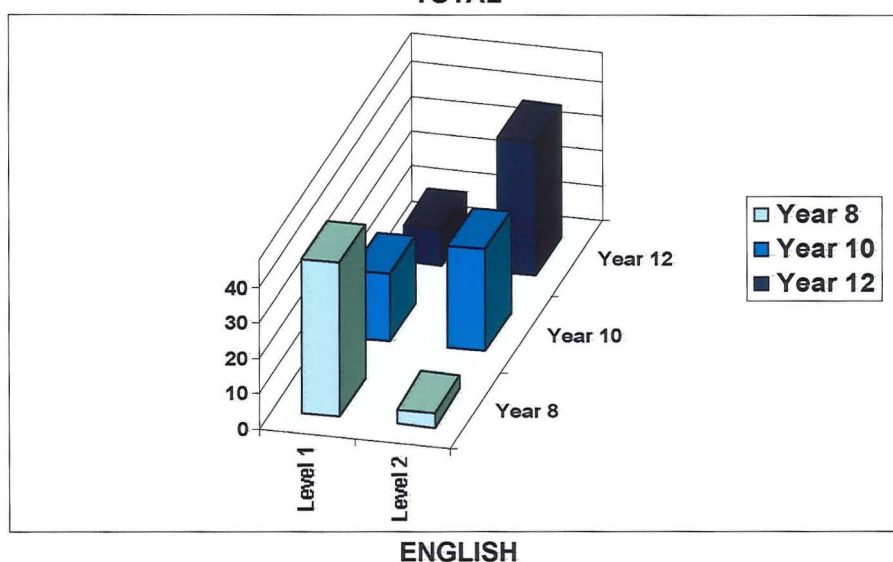
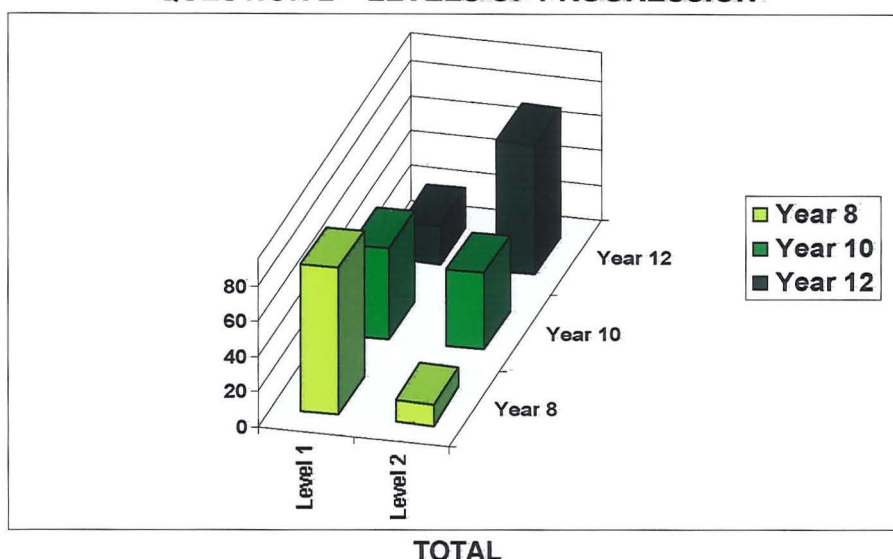
**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**Σ TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

**GRAPH 6.3 (TABLE 6.7) EMPLOTMENT  
QUESTION 2 – LEVELS OF PROGRESSION**



At lower levels, students do not refer at all to questions of methodology in history writing, even if the clash between stories is detected and justified:

[Wr] Yes, it matters the same, because in both stories they speak about Alexander the Great and about his life, although they say more things in one [story] than in the other... but both are about the same (Elena, yr 8, Sp 6, AG Q2).

[Wr] No, it doesn't matter the same because the English believed that God had helped them. Whereas the Spanish were just worried about their reputation. [Int] "In Story 1, they talk about Philip and Elizabeth; Story 2 is more detailed about what happened later" (Amy, yr 8, En 2, SA Q2).

Elena operates in the dominion of 'aboutness', that is, she evaluates the stories insofar they are "about the same thing" (Lee, 1998), but she seems to disregard the question of differences in importance here; this kind of idea could be worded as "if the stories are about the same thing, the importance must be the same in both". Amy, on her part, recognizes differences in aspect and time-scale across stories, but these are seen as a question of different amounts of information ("more detail") rather than as two different evaluations of significance. No allusion to questions of methodology in history writing is made here: the stories are examined only in relation to their substantive content.

The next two examples denote an awareness of the author behind the accounts. The first student, Sonia, demonstrates that in a very implicit way; nevertheless, the stories are not seen here as value-neutral, as in previous cases:

[Wr] It doesn't matter the same, because [...] story 1 considers the defeat like something that didn't alter history too much, but in story 2 is seen like the beginning of a failure (Sonia, yr 12, Sp 3, SA Q2).

[Wr] No, the defeat doesn't matter the same in both stories, because on the one hand, Story 1 is showing how the defeat benefited England and their monarch, and on the other, Story 2 is showing how the defeat made the Spanish economy collapse. The way the stories are explained tells me that England had the most to gain from the defeat in 1588, and they became a prosperous country, whereas the complete opposite happened to Spain (Sarah, yr 10, En 4, SA Q2).

Even though Sarah operates with a rather simple notion of the *causal* impact of the Armada, she explicitly gains an understanding of 'authorship' in the accounts. She reckons that the stories are written from different national perspectives to give us, readers, a particular grasp of the situation; clearly, she assumes that there may be different ways of explaining the defeat's importance, according to historians' intentions. Moreover, Sarah

sees the opposition across stories in terms of 'progress' (England) and 'decline' (Spain). We can say then that this student recognizes different 'plots' in which individual stories may be encoded.

### 6.3.2. Story parameters: quantitative data and particular examples

Historians, we have said above, select different kinds of facts depending on the story they want to tell. To do that, they set their story parameters accordingly. In our research tasks, we established different variations across two competing accounts in parameters such as *tone*, *aspect* and *time-scale* (Lee, 1997), in order to study pupils' ideas about significance in history when confronted with the same event or process viewed from different perspectives. The main goal of this category ('story parameters') is detecting to what extent students see that the significance attributed to an event varies according to the aspectual, temporal and evaluative contexts of the narratives within which the event is to be located. Their responses to the clash between two different assessments of the significance of an event were grouped at different levels:

- **LEVEL 1: No awareness of conflict between stories;** no reference to differences in story parameters
- **LEVEL 2: Awareness of conflict between stories, but differences mentioned in story parameters are other than those related to significance** (e.g. different words, different aspects, but the significance is the same)
- **LEVEL 3: Awareness of conflict between stories in matters of significance according to story parameters**

The great majority of responses from year 12 students, more than a half of year 10 answers and one third of year 8 responses fall into the categorization at Level 3, the highest in the scale. Differences across tasks does not seem very important except for English year 8 students, who double the number of responses within Level 1 for the Spanish Armada set; that is, younger English students find it more difficult than Spanish students of the same age to evaluate variations in significance in the Armada than in Alexander. Or, as we saw in results about importance in Question 2 compared to those in Question 1 (see Tables 6.3 and 6.6), younger Spanish students perform better when the conflict issue is directly addressed (i.e. *Does the Spanish Armada's defeat / what Alexander did matter the same in*

both stories?) than in the context of a totally open question (i.e. *Some historians think that the Spanish Armada's defeat /what Alexander did was really important; others think it wasn't. What do you think? Was it important or not?*). This could be considered as an exception to the general trend that more frequently situates English pupils' average responses at higher levels than Spanish ones (see also data in Chapter 7). For students from year 10 and year 12, though, the distribution of responses across countries within each level of progression in the category of 'story parameters' is more evenly balanced, with slightly higher scores at Level 3 for English students in year 10 and slightly higher scores for Spanish students in year 12.

**TABLE 6.8.** Story parameters by levels of progression

<b>Question 2</b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>SA</b>	14	8	22	2	2	4	4	0	4
	<b>AG</b>	7	5	12	3	4	7	1	2	3
	<b>TOTAL</b>	21	13	<b>34</b>	5	6	<b>11</b>	5	2	<b>7</b>
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>SA</b>	4	7	11	5	9	14	5	2	7
	<b>AG</b>	10	9	19	3	4	7	1	1	2
	<b>TOTAL</b>	14	16	<b>30</b>	8	13	<b>21</b>	6	3	<b>9</b>
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>SA</b>	6	9	15	17	13	30	15	22	37
	<b>AG</b>	7	10	17	18	16	34	22	21	43
	<b>TOTAL</b>	13	19	<b>32</b>	35	29	<b>64</b>	37	43	<b>80</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

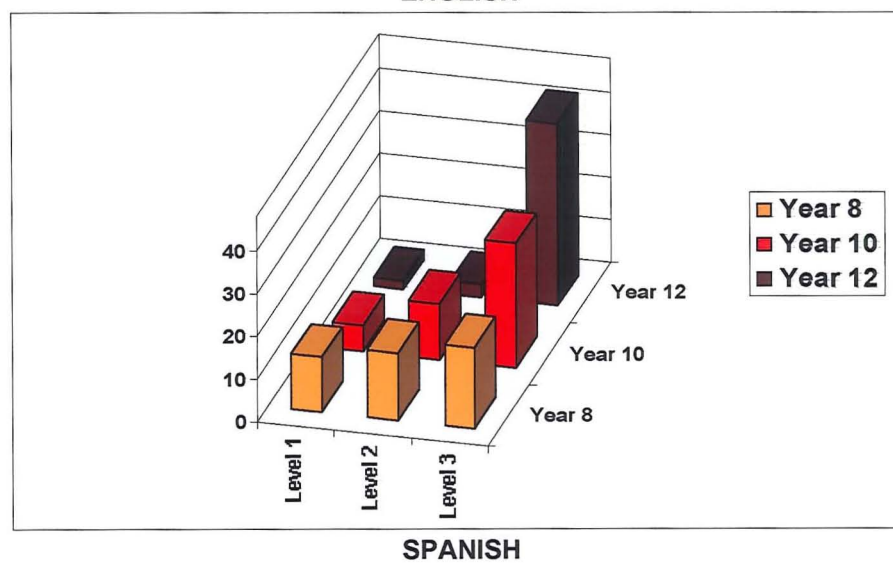
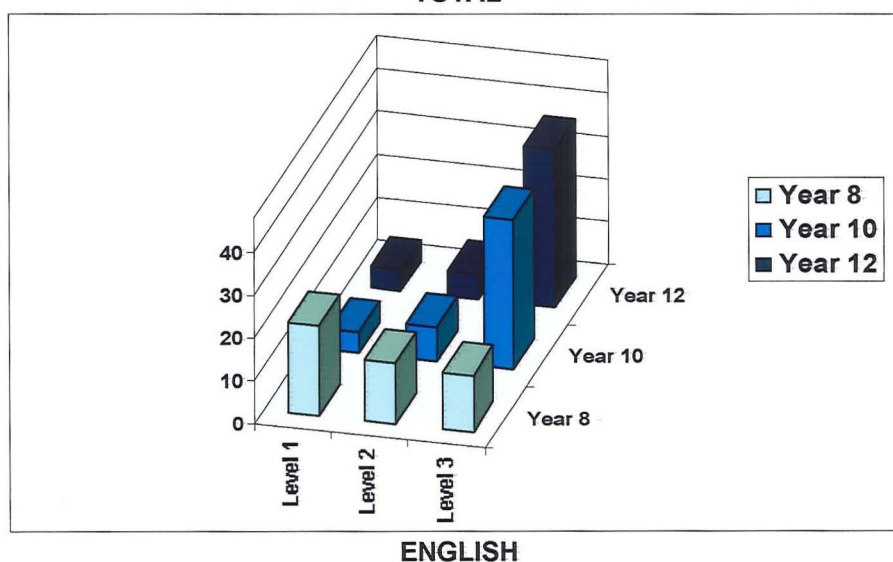
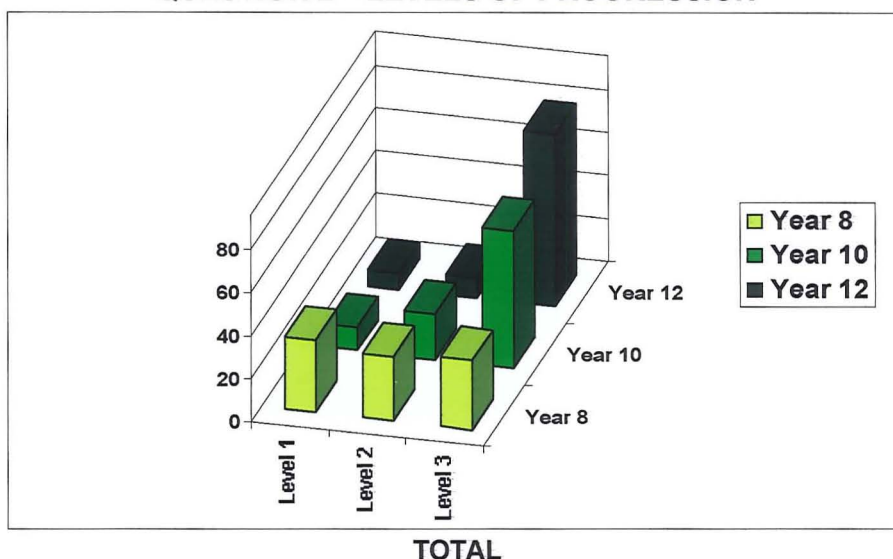
**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**Σ TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)



**GRAPH 6.4 (TABLE 6.8) STORY PARAMETERS  
QUESTION 2 – LEVELS OF PROGRESSION**



How does this level-scale work practically? An examination of some typical and some problematic examples will give substance to the ideas that have been defined theoretically as levels of progression arising from students' responses.

### **LEVEL 1: No awareness of conflict between stories**

The students in this category do not seem to recognize differences in aspect, tone or time-scale across the stories. They do not make any distinction in degree or nature of importance either. Sometimes students not making such distinctions seem to be summarizing the main points of both accounts altogether, disregarding any possible comparison across them. For most of this kind of answers, the only differences are "in the telling"; it is the same information, but in different words (Lee, 1997). Not only students from year 8, but also a minority of older students (7% in year 12 and 11% in year 10) fall into this level.

[Wr] Yes, it states clearly that the defeat meant more power for England and more independence for the countries in the Spanish Empire, such as Holland. Although uprisings were mentioned in Story 1 to give the independence to certain countries, without the defeat this would not have been possible. [Int] "In a way, both say that the outcome was in favour of Elizabeth; SA was important in both... Most of it, it's just a different wording" (Jenny, yr 10, En 4, SA Q2).

[Wr] It matters the same, Elizabeth feared Philip before the sending of the Armada, but after Philip's defeat she didn't fear any more, and that is what is said more or less in both stories (Angela, yr 8, Sp 3, SA Q2).

In these two cases above, the only disagreement may come in the amount of information, in more or less "detail". In other instances, the significance of an event --such as the Armada's defeat-- is viewed as the same across stories, because the stories are "about the same thing" (see p. 146).

[Int] "Yes, it's both about the Spanish Armada. Unless one is wrong and the other is right, the defeat has to matter the same... It is important in both stories; they are different words, but the stories are still the same" (Luqman, yr 8, En 3, SA Q2).

Luqman's argument could be read in the sense that content supplies the structure of the narrative: what matters is what is told in the story; if you get the story right, its meaning must be one. However, not all students make explicit their thoughts in such a precise way. Many others may encounter problems of use of language, when forced to confront tasks that they have not dealt with before. This may well be the case in puzzling examples such as the following:

[Wr] Yes, it matters the same, because in both stories they talk equally about Alexander the Great and his life, although in one story they say a higher number of important things than in the other one. [Int] "Yes, it matters the same, although they say more things in story 2... But both are about the same thing" (Elena, yr 8 Sp 6, AG Q2).

Elena seems to weigh each story according to the themes each one touch, and thus she appears to realize that there must be some differences in the amount of importance, but eventually she renounces to follow this argument forward and ends up establishing her evaluation just in terms of aboutness.

## **LEVEL 2: Awareness of conflict between stories, but differences mentioned in story parameters are other than those related to significance**

The next level in the scale is built upon responses that recognize differences across stories, but the significance of the event or the process that is being treated is ultimately considered as fixed. They may recognize 'theme' or 'time-scale' as part of the story's structure, but they do not seem to recognize these parameters as something to do with 'importance'. As it has been argued above, the notion of aboutness can be very useful to understand students' ideas about accounts (Lee, 1998). Many students, particularly the younger ones, locate their judgements on differences between accounts as a question of 'aboutness' rather than as a question of degree of importance: "it's about different things", "it's about different countries", "it's about different themes" could be underlying ideas in the following answers:

[Int] "It's not the same... In story 1 they talk more about what happened in the war, and in story 2 they talk more about other wars... In story 1 they talk more about Spain and in story 2 about England" (Jorge, yr 8, Sp 2, SA Q2).

[Int] "Story 1 is about the king and the queen, how she became popular in England... Story 2 is about the defeat, Holland got independence...The stories are different, but the importance of SA is more or less the same in both" (Clare, yr 8, En 1, SA Q2).

The question of information or "more or less detail", present in Level 1 to play down differences across accounts, can hide higher-order ideas in Level 2, but evidence is not always clear. At first, in the following example, Donna seems to define significance as variable, but her argument shifts towards an issue of amount of information, not of degree of importance given to the event in each story.

[Wr] It can be argued that the Spanish Armada's defeat does not matter the same in both stories. I think story one tells us the basics whereas story two tells us the effects of the Armada's defeat in more detail. Story two generally explains things in more detail. The stories are different in many ways and tell us different things (Donna, yr 10, En 1, SA Q2).

According to the criteria established for this level-scale, Donna's response was categorized at level 2, but she might imply a more sophisticated notion. In some cases, internal instability in answers makes the allocation to a particular level difficult:

[Wr] No, I don't think so, the main idea is the same in both [stories], because both tell about the defeat, although in story 2 it is more exaggerated, and it is more specific in other themes. [Int] "The theme is the same, the importance given is the same... In story 2 they say in detail from which century, when the Empire started to decline... In story 1, Spain doesn't look so bad; in story 2, they say that Spain lost everything" (Javier, yr 10, Sp 2, SA Q2).

It may well be that Javier has had more time to reflect upon the question through the interview, and his response shifts from Level 1 ("both tell about the defeat") to Level 2 ("it is more specific in other themes") -or even Level 3 ("In story 1, Spain doesn't look so bad")?-, from a notion of aboutness to the realization of differences in perspective across accounts<sup>4</sup>. The most usual consideration of differences in this level, though, is one which regards 'different themes'. Importance does not vary across stories in degree, but because of the inherent value of the theme developed by each story. Importance is fixed, then, by a concrete theme. According to this view, for Virginia positive things are intrinsically more valuable than negative ones:

[Wr] I think that [what Alexander did] is more important in story 1 than in story 2, because he built new towns, he was a great soldier and he knew how to take care of everything. He accepted people from different races, he had a lot of culture [sic]. In story 2 they talk about when he died, and about other things that are not so important (Virginia, yr 8, Sp 4, AG Q2).

Students' notion of significance at Level 2 is, therefore, rather slippery, either because of the absence of concepts such as significance in some students' cognitive frameworks, or because of lack of a more 'technical' language to define or point out conceptual differences across stories. This is an area for future research to address, in the hope that more secure categories may be developed.

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<sup>4</sup> In cases like this, allocation of responses corresponds to the higher level.

### LEVEL 3: Awareness of conflict between stories in matters of significance according to story parameters

At Level 3, definitions of the clash between accounts with reference to significance are much clearer. Students at this level start from the idea that 'stories are made' in a certain way to achieve some purpose. For them, theme or time-scale are some of the things that assess significance and they evaluate the stories with the idea of authorship in mind:

[Int] "*It's made seem more important* in Story 2... [Due to?] the economic problems Spain had, the losses of the Spanish Empire, the English built the British Empire. In Story 1 there are not so many problems for the Spanish; *it doesn't discuss the long-term effects*" (Emma, yr 10, En 2, SA Q2; emphasis added).

[Wr] No, story 2 *gives more importance* to the defeat, it *reflects* a feeling of frustration, the economic losses that this defeat caused Spain. Story 1 focuses on the social consequences; the second one, on the economic ones. [Int] "Story 1 merely tells the subjects' unease... Story 2 *goes deeper*... it gives more importance to the defeat" (Alberto, yr 12, Sp 2, SA Q2; emphasis added).

Mere distinction by themes is overcome at this level. It is the different consideration of long term consequences and the different attributions of significance (e.g., the significance for the present and future in story 2, in Alexander's task) what make the accounts differ in their interpretation of a given historical event or process.

[Wr] No, I think that story 1 just talks about how Alexander conquered Persia, and story 2 talks more about what they discovered, constructed and invented (...). [Int] "For us, that is what is more important (...); that is what benefited us" (V́ctor, yr 8, Sp 1, AG Q2).

[Wr] No. I think that Alexander the Great is portrayed as being much more important in Story 2. I think this because in Story 2 it says that Alexander opened new trade routes from East to West, but this is not mentioned in Story 1. Story 2 also says that Alexander's tomb was visited for 15 hundred years after his death, suggesting his importance (Alice, yr 10, En 4, AG Q2).

Recognition of structural distinctions is patent in year 12 students, both in England and Spain:

[Wr] Although seemingly more in story two, story one mentions the repercussions to the actions he took at the time and his matrices for expansion. Story 2 focuses on the trading implications and who have learnt from Alexander the Great. [Int] "It's seen as important in both... though it's seemingly more important in story 2... Story 1 is like more factual; it's up to you to decide; Story 2 gives you how great he was, doesn't give you a chance to think for yourself" (Hannah, yr 12, En 2, AG Q2).

[Wr] No. In story 2 more emphasis is given to the results after the expansion of his empire, in cultural and economic terms, besides what it meant for later civilizations. [Int] "In 2, the story is wider, it is more about results. In story 1, it is rather Alexander's biography, seen from what he did whilst he lived" (Guillem, yr 12, Sp 1, AG Q2).

Hannah's response illustrates a rather common English preoccupation with the idea of 'having your own view' applied to historical narratives (Lee & Ashby, 1998). Hannah and Guillem are both aware of the different time-scale deployed in each story, but they also have detected more subtle variances, outlined as the dichotomy fact/interpretation (Hannah) or as broader/narrower focus of the story (Guillem).

Finally, a specific case is worth mentioning with regard to *time* as parameter of historical narratives: the strategy of 'personification' or 'eventification'. This strategy is particularly detected in responses to Question 8 of the Spanish Armada task-set (*Some things that happen seem to make a big difference to what happens next, but it is not always easy to decide. What difference did the defeat of the Armada make?*), but also in answers to Question 2 of the Spanish Armada task-set. A common difficulty for many students, it seems, is the recognition of the duration and extent of historical events and processes. Sometimes they collapse historical events of diverse periods of time in a very short time frame. This can be considered as the 'eventification' of historical processes, more widespread among younger students, but also present among older ones. This behaviour is similar to that studied by Barton in primary North American students: they did not understand how gradual, uneven, and complicated change over time has been (Barton, 1996).

[Wr] Yes [it matters the same in both stories], because in story 1 Philip lost his subjects' confidence, and they lost their reputation as invincible people, and in story 2 it is the decadence of Spain (David, yr 10, Sp 3, SA Q2).

[Wr] No, because in story 2 Philip II lost almost all his empire in Europe and the majority of the American colonies, whereas in story 1 Philip II does not lose his empire (Jesús, yr 12, Sp 4, SA Q2).

[Wr] No, in story 1 they talk about the army's defeat, and in story 2 about how he [Philip] is losing his empire (Sergio, yr 10, Sp 4, SA Q2).

[Wr] Story 1 praises Philip's continuous fights to keep his Empire united during several centuries (...) (Israel, yr 12, Sp 5, SA Q2).

David appears to treat equally short-term consequences (confidence / reputation) and a long-term process (decline). Jesús sees the Empire's losses as an issue that concerns King Philip only, and he establishes a complete contradiction between both stories, blinded to the possibility of two different perspectives in time. Sergio recognizes the difference between an event (the defeat) and a process (the Spanish decline) across stories, but he also seems to identify both with Philip's reign, personalizing the Empire in the king, with no clear awareness of the long span of time (more than two centuries!) the Empire still lasted. Even among bright year 12 students this idea seems to prevail, as Israel's example shows above, to whom Philip is an indefatigable fighter through centuries.

The interesting thing is that we can be quite certain that this tacit strategy of conversion (from process to event) does not mainly have to do with questions of substantive content (i.e. we might have thought that King Philip and the Spanish Empire are more familiar themes for students in Spain), because this way of operating conceptually is common to English and Spanish students alike. In one of the items (item 15) of Question 8, students were asked if they could see some relation between the Armada's defeat (1588) and an event dated in 1830: the independence of most of the Spanish American colonies; Luqman's answer reflects the same idea about the permanence of Philip's influence throughout the centuries, shrinking dramatically the time-frame in which both events should be situated:

[Wr] Yes, it has something to do... They [the colonies] had lost once, but Philip had died, so they wanted now to be independent (Luqman, yr 8, En 3, SA Q8).

In item 12 of Question 8, students have to decide about the relationship between the Armada's defeat and the final loss of the European Empire for Spain in 1712. Lizzie evaluates it in her answer as it follows:

[Wr] The loss of the Empire was not due to the Spanish Armada's defeat, but Spain was struggling financially and they lost confidence in their king (Lizzie, yr 12, En 5, SA Q8).

Barton spoke of a general "lack of recognition of the duration and extent of historical events" among his students' perceptions. Narrative simplifications are also working in the minds of students in this project: the past is retold as a "set of major episodic transformations rather than a series of gradual changes (...) as a result, the achievements of several different rulers are credited to a single individual" (Barton, 1996, 70). This way of thinking is probably related as well to the findings of Carretero, López-Manjón and Jacott concerning the ideas of experts and novices about causal explanations in history. These researchers found that 'personalistic' causes were more frequently chosen by novices than by experts, irrespective of the content the given event had (Carretero et al., 1997). In our case, students may be using this kind of approach, e.g., identifying the king's actions with the Empire's ventures in order to make sense of complicated processes such as an empire's decline. On his part, Halldén has pointed out that naive understanding usually leads to a "personalization of structures"; one of the kinds of personalization this author studies is the so-called "personification", by which organizations and institutions are regarded as personified entities (Halldén, 1998)<sup>5</sup>. Along similar lines, some students from our sample speak as if Philip II had survived throughout the crisis of the 17th century and the ultimate loss of the Spanish Empire in the 19th century. And this happens in Spain as well as in England.

#### 6.4. Point of view

It is only by taking a point of view that historians can create their narratives or interpretations; the point of view provides the very way of 'seeing' the past as history (Ankersmit, 1983). Significance changes according to the point of view from which the narrative is constructed. Therefore, subjectivity cannot be avoided: "the historian acts as mediator between a postulated past and an experienced present through the medium of the text" (Berkhofer, 1995, 137). But to what extent are students aware of this feature of historical knowledge? What can they suspect about the difficulties in combining multiple voices and viewpoints with the historian's own voice and viewpoint into a historical text? How far do students realize the danger of privileging one particular point of view and defining it as reality, rather than a point of view itself?

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<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, personification in some senses (e.g. in treating 'Spain' as having purposes) is arguably a legitimate historical device (see Lindenfeld, 1999, 295 and also Ricoeur, 1979, I, 199).



Finding ways of approaching students' ideas about these highly debated questions is not an easy task. In this research project, different items were designed to explore the notion of point of view in history, either directly or inferentially. The following section is mainly grounded on participants' responses to Questions 4-5-6 in the Spanish Armada set, and Questions 3-4-5 in the Alexander the Great set (see Appendices V and VI). Both sets of questions have the same structure: two apparently contradictory sentences (In the Armada task-set, *Story 1 says that "the defeat of the Armada did not prevent Philip II from being the most powerful king in the Western world"; Story 2 says that "the defeat of the Armada was a decisive setback to Philip II and the Spanish Empire"*. In the case of Alexander, *Story 1 says that "Most of the towns Alexander built quickly fell into ruins after his death; Story 2 says that "The towns Alexander built were one of his longest-lasting achievements"*), taken out from the stories, are presented first, followed by one multiple-choice question, a second item that searches for a justification of choice, and a third item that aims to explore further that justification.

The structure of those questions was developed from one of the studies of the *Chata* Project, which focused on pupils' ideas about historical accounts (Lee, Dickinson & Ashby, 1996a and 1996b; Lee, 1997). Choices were designed to obtain categorized responses in a scale of progression; they stemmed from students' ideas and wording. Hypotheses were advanced about how students were likely to behave in their selection of options. Choices (a) *no one knows because we weren't there*, (b) *we haven't got enough information to find out* and (f) *one of the stories must be wrong* see the conflict as a factual issue, that only could be solved by adding more information; at this level, no reference to the notion of point of view is made. In our project, these three choices were collapsed to build up the first category, translated into the lower level of progression. Choices (c) *historians usually take sides*, (e) *historians just think differently from each other* and (d) *the sentences answer different questions assume* a reference, explicit or implicit, to the notion of point of view in history. The first one (*historians usually take sides*) codes for ideas that consider the question of viewpoints in history as illegitimate, that is, partisan or partial. The second one (*historians just think differently from each other*) tries to detect those students that see this notion as legitimate: it is an individually guided and socially determined option that the historian takes, most of the time unintentionally. The third choice (*the sentences answer different questions*) confronts this notion as something inherent to the nature of the account; point of view in history, as in any other narrative, is unavoidable; otherwise nothing could be written (Lee, 1997).

Starting from those codes, levels of progression were devised in the following way:

- **LEVEL 1: No indication of the notion;** issue is seen only as factual
- **LEVEL 2: Illegitimate point of view:** historians' personal (interests, likes, dislikes) and social biases (ideology, social background) are seen as partisan
- **LEVEL 3: Legitimate point of view:** historians' personal (interests, likes, dislikes) and social biases (ideology, social background); issues of evidence (gaps, problematic interpretations)
- **LEVEL 4: Necessary condition in the practice of history:** 'point of view' responds to the logic of the account (e.g. different theories in causal weighting or different attributions of significance)

Graph 6.5 and Table 6.9 show the number of choices by level of progression with regard to students' ideas about point of view in historical narratives. Responses at Level 1 ('Issue is seen as factual') clearly decrease with age, and this fact is more pronounced among English students. Differences across countries are more noticeable at Level 2 ('Illegitimate Point of View'); in England, the number of responses decrease with age; in Spain, it rises from year 8 to year 12. The highest number of responses in both countries at all age groups belongs to Level 3 ('Legitimate Point of View'). Progression to the top Level 4 ('Point of View as Necessary') runs in parallel in both countries and increases with age.

#### **LEVEL 1: No indication of the notion; issue is seen as factual**

At this level, the notion of point of view in history is not encountered. When confronted with competing explanations, students may decide that the problem can be solved at best by adding up more information and at worst by resigning ourselves to the fact that the past is unknowable (Lee, 1997). This is the kind of conclusion drawn by Amy and Sara, for instance, who chose option 'b' (*we haven't got enough information to find out*):

[Int] "We haven't all the thoughts to prove what really happened. The historians would have two answers... We will never know the real truth"  
(Amy, yr 8, En 2, SA Q4-5-6).

[Wr] We don't have enough information, because there are things that we haven't studied and I'd like they told me the whole story to find out (Sara, yr 8, Sp 2, SA Q 4-5-6).

**TABLE 6.9. Point of View:** Number of choices to SA Question 4 and AG Question 3 categorized by levels of progression as *Issue seen as Factual*, *Illegitimate Point of View*, *Legitimate Point of View* and *Point of View as Necessary*

<u>AG Question 4</u>		Yr 8			Yr 10			Yr 12		
		En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total
Level 1	SA	9	5	14	1	3	4	0	2	2
	AG	10	10	20	5	6	11	2	4	6
	TOTAL	19	15	34	6	9	15	2	6	8
Level 2	SA	4	2	6	1	1	2	0	8	8
	AG	4	0	4	0	2	2	1	1	2
	TOTAL	8	2	10	1	3	4	1	9	10
Level 3	SA	6	13	19	16	11	27	13	5	18
	AG	5	11	16	11	13	24	11	13	24
	TOTAL	11	24	35	27	24	51	24	18	42
Level 4	SA	5	4	9	6	9	15	9	9	18
	AG	4	3	7	8	3	11	10	6	16
	TOTAL	9	7	16	14	12	26	19	15	34

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

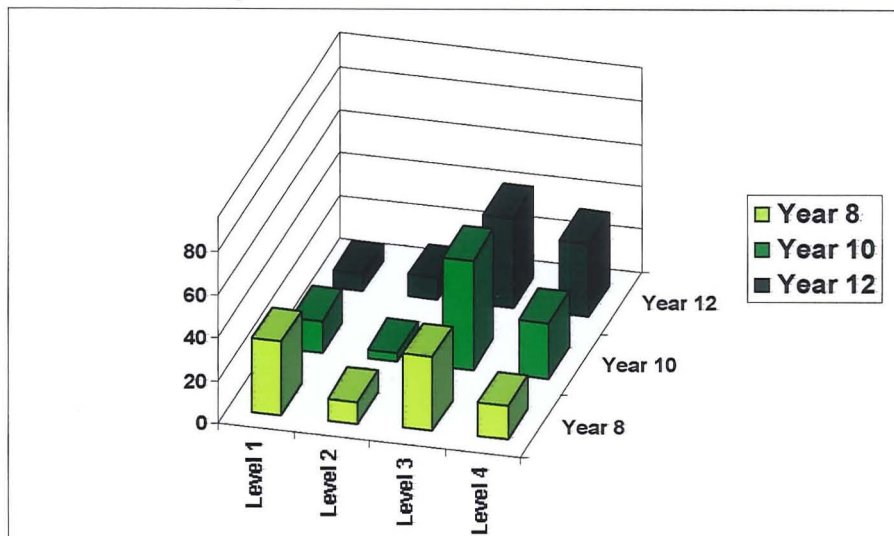
**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

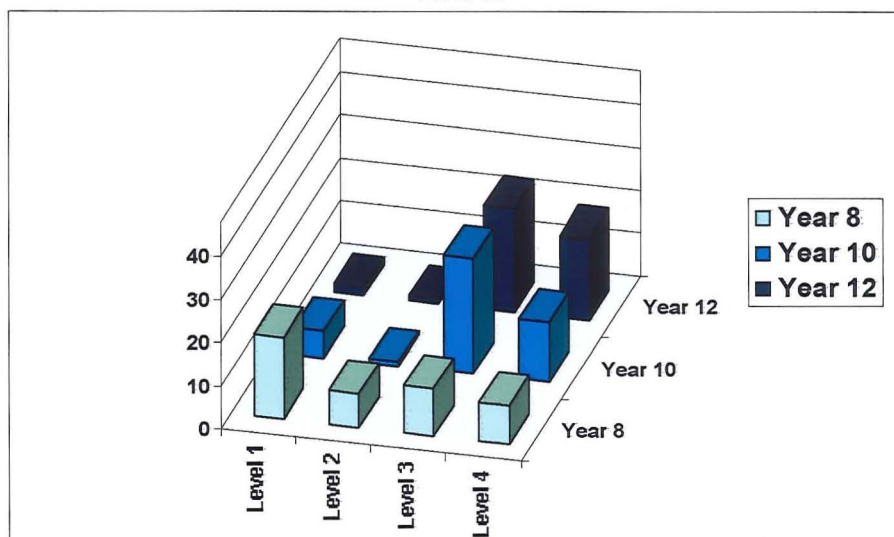
**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**Σ TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

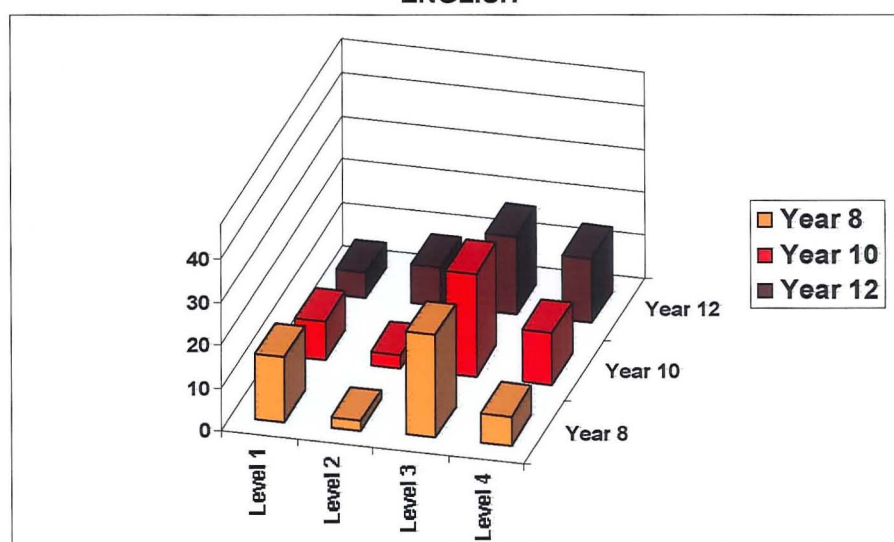
**GRAPH 6.5 (TABLE 6.9) POINT OF VIEW**  
**SA QUESTION 3, AG QUESTION 4 – LEVELS OF PROGRESSION**



**TOTAL**



**ENGLISH**



**SPANISH**

Similar ideas may also be present among students who chose option 'f' (*one of the stories must be wrong*), and include opinions ("ideas") and facts ("information") in the same conceptual dominion:

[Wr] I thought one of the stories was wrong because when you get information you might have different ideas but you can't have the complete opposite of something (James, yr 8, En 3, SA Q4-5-6).

[Wr] It is impossible that the two stories are so different. [Int] "They say absolutely the opposite... One has to be a lie" (Eduardo, yr 12, Sp 3, AG Q3-4-5).

Reasoning at this level is one of the two most common among younger students in both countries, and the least recurrent among older students (see Table 6.9).

## **LEVEL 2: Illegitimate point of view**

At this level, pupils perceive a point of view in historical accounts only as a "bias" that must be avoided (choice 'c' of Questions 3 and 4 of each task). The study of pupils' ideas about the notion of point of view as illegitimate, including partisanship, entails several difficulties. First, the analysis of quantitative data may not be sufficient, because in many justifications of choice their ideas about illegitimate and legitimate viewpoints are intermingled. Besides, both notions do not have to be mutually exclusive; recognition of both concepts of point of view can be present in individual responses. Apart from the questions mentioned above, other items could throw light on this notion, particularly the explanations to the issue of differences across the two stories in Question 2.

Answers at this level were in a minority in all year groups, except in the case of year 12 Spanish students. In contrast, accepting this idea among younger students is more frequent in the English ones. For Darren the question is clear in both types of task content:

[Wr] Because Story 1 could be written by a Spanish historian and Story 2 could be the opposite (Darren, yr 8, En 6, AG Q3-4-5).

[Wr] A Greek historian could have written Story 2. [Int] "Story 1 was written by the opposite side historian, anyway [A Persian one, you mean?] Yeah, probably" (Darren, yr 8, En 6, AG Q4-5-6).

The idea of neutrality comes up in younger English students, not in Spanish ones. It can be assimilated to the concept of 'perspectiveless neutrality' detected by Barca-Oliveira in older Portuguese students (Barca-Oliveira, 1996). It seems that younger English students are more familiar with structural concepts in history, such as objectivity or neutrality, than

Spanish or Portuguese of the same age. For them, it is a question of finding out the middle point of the argument.

[Int] "You wouldn't say that your country was not good... No, you can't help doing that... You don't want to be criticized... They still can have different backgrounds, like religion... If you had to write an accurate story, you would need a neutral person, say a French" (Philip, yr 8, En 2, SA Q4-5-6).

[Int] "Historians will always be biased... You'll have to mix them up a bit and come to see what really happened" (Jonathan, yr 8, En 2, SA Q4-5-6).

In this research sample, more Spanish students than English ones from year 10 and especially from year 12 see the issue in partisan terms:

[Wr] Because if historians were Spanish or English, each one would tell something that favoured their country. [Int] "Each country writes what is better for them" (Javier, yr 10, Sp 2, SA Q2).

[Wr] Because one of the stories must have been written by the Spanish and the other by the English that is why each one tells only the good things of each country. [Int] "History is manipulated, they don't tell us all the facts, really, because it is written by the winners, the losers cannot... they don't write anything; they don't give their opinion" (Aida, yr 12, Sp 4, SA Q4-5-6).

Aida's response represents a common view among some students that historians always intentionally distort "the facts", implying a deep distrust of the whole profession. At a different moment of the interview, Aida was asked: "Then why do you study history?" And her answer was: "I don't know, they have put it like that in the curriculum... To be honest, I don't like history very much...". When point of view is not recognized as unavoidable and it is taken as distortion or manipulation of history, this idea is often accompanied by low levels of empathy and a poor consideration of subjective significance: if history is nothing but a load of lies, what's the use of studying it? It would be expected, nonetheless, that suitable teaching could easily boost these kinds of ideas and attitudes towards a better understanding of the limits of historical knowledge and methods, as the higher levels of ideas in this notion that older English students present show.

### LEVEL 3: Legitimate point of view

The notion of point of view is considered as *legitimate* (choice 'e') for the majority of students from the research sample, according to the quantitative data obtained from Questions 4 and 3 of each task, respectively (see Table 6.9 and Graph 6.5). When their justifications of choice are considered, though, a wide range of internal variations in this general idea arises. For some pupils, particularly the younger ones, point of view is considered only as an *opinion*, just like anybody else's:

[Wr] I chose (e) because everyone is different, therefore we all think and look at things from different angles and in different ways (Ceris, yr 8, En 5, SA Q 4-5-6).

[Int] "There are different ways of thinking, not only among historians, but also among ordinary people" (Cristina, yr 8, Sp 1, SA Q4-5-6).

Other younger pupils are aware of the inevitability of *history as interpretation* and of the two main components of history, *evidence and interpretation*:

[Int] "Because as far as history is never clear, each one can have their ideas (Alejandro, yr 8, Sp 3, SA Q4-5-6).

[Int] "Each one has his/her own opinion, according to the relics of history" (Roberto, yr 8, Sp 4, SA Q4-5-6).

This conceptualization and wording match with the "English preoccupation with having your own opinion" pointed out by Ashby and Lee in their study about *Information, Opinion and beyond* (Ashby & Lee, 1998). Older students offer even clearer examples of the idea that history writing is subjected to the limits of evidence, which makes interpretation inescapable; and also that different interpretations may be brought to evidence for story parameters. For these pupils, the point of view from which evidence is examined is one way to understand significance in history:

[Wr] (...) It is not really taking sides or thinking differently, it is more a difference of opinion, having a different viewpoint to another historian, that makes the work slightly biased one way or another. [Int] "They have different opinions and views; they form them examining the sources... What you think is the most important thing for something happening, or the most significant things... that may be different from another person's point of view" (Emma, yr 10, En 2, SA Q 4-5-6).

[Wr] Because historians must come to a conclusion and try to be fair (...) Historians think differently but also try to influence others at times; e.g. A German historian may blame Great Britain for World War II and a

British one blame Germany. [Int] "They may not realize they're being biased...bias may be intentional or unintentional. If people are going to read it... If they put just their opinion, not only facts..." (Stuart, yr 10, En 3, SA Q4-5-6).

[Wr] (...) I think a better sentence would be 'The historians are using different sources'. The historians are using sources with different biases, perhaps in Story 1 the historian is using Spanish sources and Story 2 is using English sources from around the time. [Int] "Two historians may look at the same source, but still interpret it differently, they may look at other people's points of view of what happened" (Tom, yr 10, En 6, SA Q 4-5-6).

[Wr] Historians take different viewpoints due to their opinions and what sources they have seen, this is why two stories can be different but not wrong (Ian, yr 12, En 2, SA Q4-5-6).

The students whose answers are shown above can weigh choices (c) and (e) and evaluate historians' work beyond mere partisanship. In English students, 'opinion' is often identified with 'viewpoint', 'facts' and 'opinions' are considered separately, and the notion of 'unintentional bias' comes up categorically (see also Ashby & Lee, 1998); besides, they emphasize the importance of considering where the evidence comes from. For a majority of the Spanish ones, though, a lack of specific language may frequently blur higher-order ideas, but this is not always the case; some Spanish students, even with no explicit teaching about structural concepts in history, can offer criteria to explain why historians think differently, not just "because they do" (a more frequent response in Spanish year 8 and 10), and follow the same argumental line as we saw in English examples.

[Wr] Sometimes historians don't agree because they don't have enough data or they interpret those data differently and give different versions of the facts, depending on whether the information comes from one side or another, and that has an effect when you study history in books. [Int] "There is a version of the facts, according to the information and where that information comes from" (Marta, yr 10, Sp 1, SA Q4-5-6).

[Wr] Because of the point of view. Maybe a Spaniard of that age didn't think the Armada's defeat was so important, but an English did see it as very important, because they could see new possibilities to export and trade in other areas... I think that historians don't agree because it depends on the area where they live or the society that surrounds them (Sergio, yr 12, Sp 4, SA Q9).



Students that operate at this level tend to go beyond the issue of a more or less simplistic sense of partisanship towards the idea that one of the most influencing aspects of the historians' individual and social background is their *national perspective*. For them, this aspect leads, more than anything else, to the selection of sources and the focus of writing that the historian decides:

[Wr] I think that it depends, each one would be influenced in a different way, and that is why each historian looks at it in a different way, that is to say, they will value it according to their position with respect to the Armada. I guess that for the English it would be very important, because it benefited them, and for the Spanish, it wouldn't, or better to say, they'd not even value it. [Int] "It encouraged the English, it gave them more confidence... With regard to Spain, its good reputation went down a little bit, but not too much" (Sonia, yr 12, Sp 3, SA Q1).

[Wr] No. In Story 1 I think it portrays an image of Philip II adamant that the strength of his empire has not altered. However, Story 2 highlights the Armada's defeat as 'the beginning of the Empire's decline'. [Int] "Both stories don't mean the same at all, they are from different viewpoints: Story 1 is Philip's view, Story 2, Elizabeth's view" (Laura, yr 10, En 5, SA Q2).

In examples like those shown above, the country of origin makes a difference not because historians always tend to favour their country, but because it has a great influence on the sources available to them or the ideas they hold because of their national backgrounds<sup>6</sup>.

#### **LEVEL 4: Necessary condition in the practice of history**

Responses that consider 'point of view' as something inherent in the logic of the account were allocated at the higher level of the scale of progression with regard to ideas about historical significance. Students at this level usually chose option (d): *the sentences answer different questions*. Sometimes they explicitly deny partisanship as characteristic of history writing. Differences across stories arise from focus and perspective, and these do not depend only on historians' personal choices and methods, but on the structure of the narrative itself (Lee, 1997).

[Wr] I thought (d) because story 1 is talking about an overview of Philip II's power. While story 2 talks about the immediate consequences of the Armada's defeat. I really think that the two sentences are just speaking

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<sup>6</sup> This analysis differentiates between legitimate and illegitimate partisanship, whereas Lee (1997) tends to treat all references to partisanship as suggesting illegitimacy.

from different times with different meanings (Amy, yr 10, En 5, SA 4-5-6).

[Int] "It's not that they think differently from each other, or they take sides. What happens is that they focus on different things, they emphasize some things more than others, depending on the point of view they have" (Elena, yr 12, Sp 1, AG Q3-4-5).

[Wr] Each text is based on a different vision of the facts, each one focuses on a different consequence, the first story on the losses of territories and the second one on the economy in general. They don't need to take one side or the other. (María, yr 12, Sp 1, SA Q4-5-6).

The stories are not illegitimately "biased"; they may refer to different parts of the whole thing (applying the common-sense notion of partiality / totality to a historical account, as Sarah does in the example below); to different points in the time-scale; or to different themes and contexts. Therefore, significance varies according to point of view, and that is how historical narratives work; the two sentences given in the question are not viewed as contradictory, and the conflict can be overcome by making up an integrating story grounded on both (Story 1 and 2).

[Wr] (...) The pair of stories, when read together, do not seem like two historians' interpretations, but the whole story of what happened (Sarah, yr 10, En 4, SA Q4-5-6).

[Wr] It could have been a setback with dire consequences, but he (Philip) could still be very powerful. One looks at short term, one at long, therefore different questions (Fraser, yr 8, En 6, SA Q4-5-6).

[Wr] In the context of the sentences they are different. The first is talking about Philip's continued power and influence in his colonies all over Europe. The second is dealing not with his power and influence over a kingdom, but his economic situation and how it was harmed by the battle (Hannah, yr 12, En 2, SA Q4-5-6).

This order of ideas is visible in students from the research sample at all age groups. However, the number of answers classified at this level increases with age in both countries. Interestingly, it was possible to detect a minority of pupils from year 8 who were able to reflect to a certain degree of sophistication about the nature of historical point of view.

## Conclusions

The empirical analysis has shown that the categorization of levels of progression in the evaluation of 'point of view' and significance in history should be refined more, because it has been found that there are important differences *within* categories. These differences may mean that distinct sets of ideas are working within the same category. As we have seen, for example, within Level 3 ('Legitimate Point of View') there may be a considerable distance from ideas that understand 'point of view' as unqualified opinion to ideas that perceive that 'point of view' is determined by what is available as evidence and also by the interpretation that historians may give to evidence (mediated by their background and interests). Further research with newly targeted research tasks (new data) to study the internal structure of some categories is one of the things that needs to be done at a second stage of analysis, for which there is not enough space here.

## 6.5. Validity and Truth

In this final section, students' ideas will be analyzed in terms of the relationship between significance and accounts in history in the particular context of rival interpretations. Validity, truth and truthfulness are not synonyms, but sometimes historians and philosophers employ them interchangeably when confronting the problem of justifying their claims (see Chapter 2, section 2.3). Among diverse theories of truth, the most common conception of knowledge is that of 'justified belief': claims about 'truth' must always be justified by appeal to reasons that resist disproof and disbelief (consensus theory). What makes knowledge objective is not that it constitutes some positivist's free-standing reality, but rather that it has stood up to sustained scrutiny and been tested by the best available evidence (Popper, 1972). There is unanimous agreement about the idea that conclusions in history do change over time; but revisability is not to be confused with free-for-all relativism, the view that since no theory is the ultimate truth, all theories, like all people, are equal (Bruner, 1997).

However, according to Rorty, the past does not provide us with any criterion of choice between alternative interpretations; we can only compare interpretations with one another, not with something beyond language called 'fact' (Rorty, 1989). Along these lines, to Ankersmit, narrative substances, or any interpretative apparatus, do not refer to past reality, but to the narrative text in which they play their role (Ankersmit, 1983); therefore, narrative substances cannot be validated by simply "checking the facts". The Industrial

Revolution, for instance, can be studied as a long term process through the centuries, or as the turning-point that marks the fringe between Modern and Contemporary History; focus cannot be falsified by facts, it is arguments that must be offered to support or attack each focus. The answer from a moderate objectivist position is that agreement about the past must be regarded from various points of view --or 'intersperspectivism', see Dray, (1978)--; and that 'truth' should be understood in the sense that historical accounts refer to things in the world, not just to historians' ideas or concepts. In a historian's words, "history is always about something outside the text; the real past" (Schama, 1995). Ultimately, the question is not just that some interpretations may be better representations of the past than others; they also should be considered as better tools for dealing with the past for one or another purpose.

In this project, students' ideas of rival interpretations about historical significance were mainly analyzed from their responses to Question 7 in the Spanish Armada task-set and Question 6 in the Alexander task-set (see Appendices V and VI). Two sentences from the parallel stories were selected and confronted (In the Armada task-set, *Story 1 says that "the defeat of the Armada did not prevent Philip II from being the most powerful king in the Western world"; Story 2 says that "the defeat of the Armada was a decisive setback to Philip II and the Spanish Empire"*. In the case of Alexander, *Story 1 says that "Most of the towns Alexander built quickly fell into ruins after his death; Story 2 says that "The towns Alexander built were one of his longest-lasting achievements")*<sup>7</sup>. Then pupils were asked: *How could you decide which is best?* The rationale of this question follows a similar one already tested in the *Chata Project*, in which the term 'rival' is conceptualized as competing or conflicting rather than contradictory (Lee & Ashby, 1998, and see below, p. 180). It was assumed that, from the reading of the stories at the beginning of each task, it should be clear that there is no straightforward agreement among historians about the significance of the Armada's defeat and Alexander's deeds for subsequent events and processes. Sample students must then explain this (apparent?) lack of consensus.

From the analysis of the data obtained in those two questions described above, different categories were employed (again inductively constructed from multiple readings of the responses), which were ordered in a level-scale as follows:

- **LEVEL1: Factual clash:** The issue of two rival interpretations assessing the significance of an event or process is seen as a factual conflict (or even a contradiction)

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<sup>7</sup> These are the same sentences that were proposed in the previous item, Questions 4-5-6 for the Armada and 3-4-5 for Alexander, see p. 157 above.

**1.1. Responses in this category do not appeal to any kind of criteria for testing validity or truth**

**1.2. Responses in this category may appeal to some kind of criteria, but they only refer back to facts;** in any case, interpretation is seen as a disagreement over the facts

**- LEVEL 2: Partial / Temporal conflict:** the issue of two rival interpretations is seen as a part / whole conflict or a temporal conflict (i.e. different discrete times in stories). **Responses assign some kind of criteria for testing for validity or truth other than simply facts**

**- LEVEL 3: Aspectual: alternative interpretations:** the relation between two rival interpretations is seen not just as conflicting, but also (or mainly) as alternative or competing (i.e. it is aspectual). **Responses in this category explicitly differentiate their criteria for testing facts and interpretations in issues of validity and significance in history**

After the analysis of empirical data, general patterns of categorizations in students' responses were established by year group, country and task-set, as shown in Table 6.10 and Graph 6.6. In the next sections, an examination of main findings in quantitative terms is followed by a qualitative study of particular cases in each category.

The quantitative analysis reveals the following trends:

a) Progression is shown from ideas that treat the question of disagreement between interpretations as a problem of lack of evidence, or clash between facts, through reasoning about differences in the interpretations placed on the evidence, or about variations in the period of time over which the changes are judged, to the realization that historians' work is necessarily selective, and variations of significance stem from the concentration on different aspects of the story.

b) This progression is detected across year groups, from younger students to older ones, in both countries.

First, a great majority of the students from year 8, the younger ones, fits into the first category (*Factual clash*). In the other two groups, half of the year 10s and less than one third of the year 12s belong to this category as well. Second, less than one third among sample students in each year group fall under the second category (*Partial / Temporal conflict*). Third, 6.2% of year 8 students, 21.3% of year 10, and almost 44% of year 12 belong to the highest category of progression (*Aspectual: alternative interpretations*).

c) There is probably an influence of task content in this question (SA Q7 / AG Q6), particularly among younger students. They seem to be working more in content-only terms in the Alexander the Great task-set than in the Armada task-set.

**TABLE 6.10. Validity and Truth:** attempts to deal with the validity of different assessment of significance in the specific context of two rival sentences

<b><u>AG Question 6</u></b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>SA</b>	15	17	32	8	14*	22	6	8	14
	<b>AG</b>	20	20	40	11	17	28	8	7	15
	<b>TOTAL</b>	35	37	<b>72</b>	19	31	<b>50</b>	14	15	<b>29</b>
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>SA</b>	7	5	12	8	5*	13	7	8	15
	<b>AG</b>	3	3	6	6	4	10	4	6	10
	<b>TOTAL</b>	10	8	<b>18</b>	14	9	<b>23</b>	11	14	<b>25</b>
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>SA</b>	2	2	4	8	3*	11	11	8	19
	<b>AG</b>	1	1	2	6	3	9	12	11	23
	<b>TOTAL</b>	3	3	<b>6</b>	14	6	<b>20</b>	23	19	<b>42</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

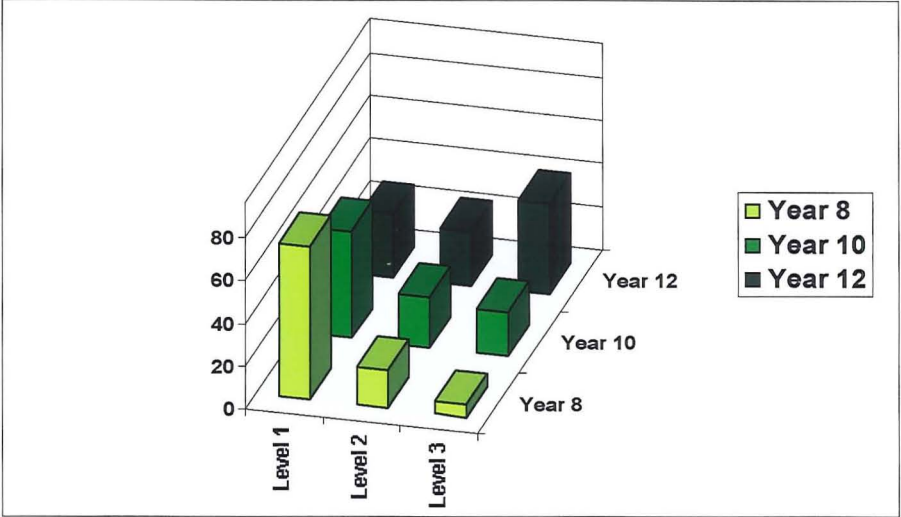
**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

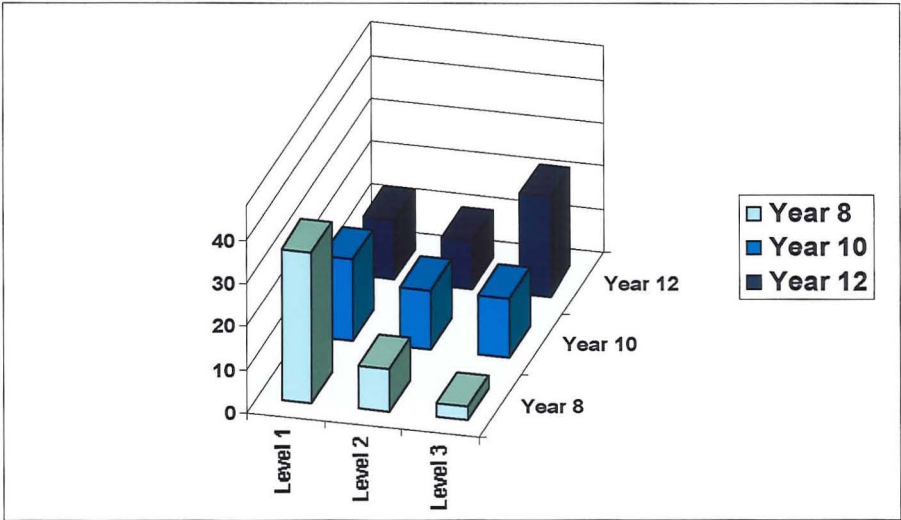
**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**Σ TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year) [\*Note: in yr 10, SA, Sp, n=22]

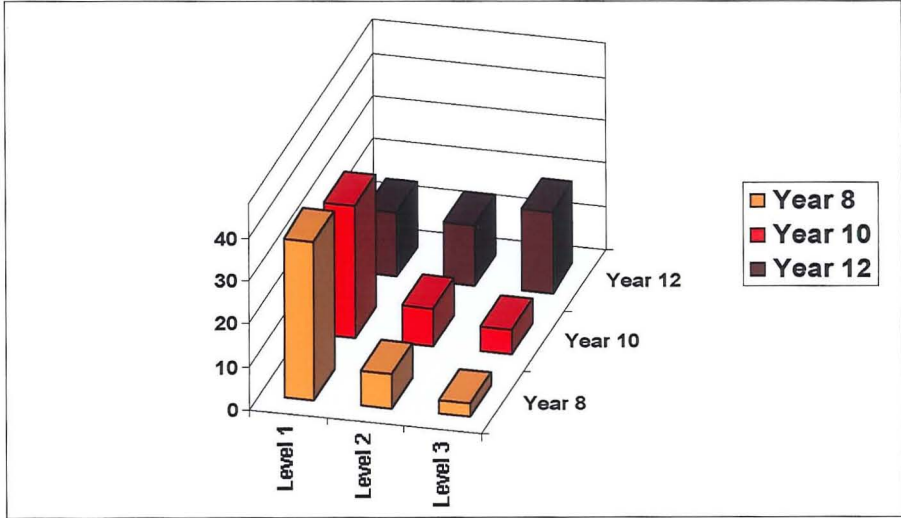
**GRAPH 6.6 (TABLE 6.10) VALIDITY AND TRUTH  
SA QUESTION 7, AG QUESTION 6 – LEVELS OF PROGRESSION**



**TOTAL**



**ENGLISH**



**SPANISH**

d) There are always more Spanish students than English ones who consider the issue of two rival interpretations as a factual clash; this happens in all year groups, but differences are more pronounced for year 10 pupils. The number of responses that see the question as aspectual is very similar across countries in the extreme age groups: year 8 and year 12; among year 10s, the number of English students double the number of Spanish students. Correspondingly, the Spanish students outnumber the English ones at Level 1. Although the number of students at Level 3 is similar in both countries, progression in issues of validity and truth in relation to significance appears to occur at earlier stages in England (between year 8 and year 10) than in Spain (between year 10 and year 12).

### **LEVEL1: Factual clash**

Students' responses allocated at this level manifest the common feature of assessing the significance of events or processes in alternative accounts by the same means that they would evaluate statements of fact; therefore, the issue is understood as a factual clash that can be validated or rejected by relevant evidence. This way of thinking is perfectly sensible in a conceptual framework that identifies 'history' with 'the past', with no further methodological considerations.

In the lowest category, a minority of students, especially the younger ones, do not see a possible comparison with subsequent events, and answer according to the *intrinsic* nature of the significance in each sentence, qualified as 'bad' or 'good'. Jonathan, for instance, seems to think a longer time-scale is intrinsically better:

[Wr] I don't see that one is better or worse than the other is. [Int] "Maybe the sentence 1, because it says something good" (Daniel, yr 10, Sp 6, SA Q7).

[Wr] I think that Story two was better because it lasted longer (Jonathan, yr 8, En 1, AG Q6).

For the majority of students at this level there is a direct elision of the problem of method ("how") that the task question poses (*How could you decide which is best?*); hence they judge from the stories they had read and make a choice:

[Wr] I think that the best is the sentence from Story 2, because if you read what happened later, you can deduce that it [the defeat] was the decisive blow for the Spanish Empire's downfall (Rebeca, yr 10, Sp 6, SA Q7).

[Int] "Story 2 is the best, because SA did bring down the Spanish Empire and Holland and a lot of other countries started to rebel against the Spanish Empire" (Rory, yr 8, En 1, SA Q7).



[Wr] I would say that the defeat of the Armada caused a setback to Philip and the Spanish Empire, because after being defeated, it was bound to have some effect on him, the Spanish economy became weaker. "Story 1 could be wrong in some aspects; Story 2 is best" (Donna, yr 10, En 1, SA Q7).

These three participants try to test the accounts by looking at the subsequent events, and then decide that one of the versions is closer to the truth than the other one, according to their interpretation of the stories. This notion could carry with it something similar to the idea of accounts as *copies of the past*, which may be more or less accurate (Lee & Ashby, 1998). In other cases, 'the best' is made equal to 'the more information in it', in search of that accuracy:

[Wr] I think that Story 2 is the best, because it includes a lot of dates and facts about the Spanish attack and afterwards the British build-up of its own empire (Wayne, yr 12, En 4, SA Q7).

In the second subcategory of Level 1 (*Factual clash*), students' responses do answer the question of method (*how could you decide...*), but always refer back to facts to justify it. Beyond mere information, one of the reasons more generally given to explain the lack of consensus between accounts is a question of evidence: either different kinds of sources were consulted, or there are gaps in the sources that must be filled in to have the 'complete' version of the past. In the following examples, there is a gradation of ideas about the consideration of sources as 'information' or as 'evidence for something else' (See Ashby & Lee, 1998). Some year 8 English responses in the sample were particularly clear at this level.

[Int] "See which one matches with the information" (James, yr 8, En 4, AG Q6).

[Int] "Go to primary sources, see if [generals] in his army may have written a book, and *it may still be around somewhere*" (Mark, yr 8, En 4, AG Q6, my emphasis).

[Wr] The way to decide which is best is to either look in more books to support one of the statements (evidence) or just go to Greece and find out for yourself! (Ceris, yr 8, En 5, AG Q6).

[Wr] I don't think we can decide on which sentence is best, because there is not enough evidence. If there was a *primary source from a neutral point* to tell us either one or the other, then we might be able to find the best statement. There isn't, so the only sources we have are written by

historians that weren't there, or are biased (Philip, yr 8, En 2, AG Q6, my emphasis).

It looks as though the idea of 'the neutral source' hovered over these students' minds to solve all our problems of uncertainty in history. Notions of history as 'testimony of the past', already studied in relation to second-order concepts such as empathy or evidence (Ashby & Lee, 1987; Shemilt, 1987), are also present here. Spanish students at this level can talk in still more absolute terms about issues of validity and truth:

[Int] "Having more information and knowing *how the defeat really happened...* Searching what they wrote when it happened, *the truth must exist somewhere*" (Eva, yr 10, Sp 3, SA Q7, emphasis added).

Cross-culturally, subtle differences may be appreciated between students' responses, even if they appear small in the quantitative analysis. In the following cases, the English response is a very good summary of the possibilities students have at this level to test rival accounts.

[Wr] You could decide which was best by studying sources from the time. You could go to the sites of these towns now and see what is there now. Read about Alexander from what other people wrote and look at his other achievements to see how important they were and how long they lasted (Amy, yr 10, En 5, AG Q6).

In this category, what are the tools to validate alternative interpretations? Amy clearly explains it: primary sources, data from witnesses of the time, archaeological evidence and secondary sources. In contrast, a Spanish answer of the same level is more ambiguous and does not go beyond the question of information:

[Wr] You would have to be informed before about the battle, then you could choose. Right now I couldn't choose, because I can't know which is the right answer. Just with information, from different places. [Int] "I can't know for sure, I know very little about this. If I had more information, I'd know how to decide, I'd look at different arguments, but right now...." (Beatriz, yr 10, Sp 5, SA Q7).

Special cases are those responses in which, as was discussed in the above sections, the sense of partisanship arises in a very clear-cut way, particularly Spanish ones:

[Wr] Story 2 [is the best], because I am Spanish, and the second sentence doesn't put Spain in such a difficult situation. [Int] "If you talk about your country, you talk of good things about it, you don't speak well of the opponent. Although I think that there should be just one story, the true,

and that's it, but I understand that it's almost impossible" (Daniel, yr 10, Sp 2, SA Q7).

Within this conceptual framework, there is no possibility left to discuss 'alternative' or intermediate positions, because partisanship is taken for granted, with a pejorative meaning, in all historical considerations, and if we cannot find that "true story", history as a serious matter becomes impossible. In higher categories, more sophisticated ideas can help overcome this dilemma.

## **LEVEL 2: Partial / Temporal conflict**

Students within this category see the question of lack of consensus in historical accounts as something that can be reconciled, at least partly, and can be explained by differences in the time that the accounts allegedly refer to, or by consideration of accounts as part of 'the whole story'. This implies that students at this level are aware of the selective character of history, and of the viewpoints that different historians may take. This category of ideas is connected with the notion of 'multiple pasts' studied by Lee & Ashby in English students when dealing with the end of the Roman Empire (Lee & Ashby, 1998).

Transitional answers (between Level 1 and Level 2) opt for one choice, but add new insights at some point, usually in the interview data. In the following example, Raquel makes clear that both sentences must be viewed in the context of each story; one would be partial ("a kind of detail"), the other one, global.

[Wr] To me, sentence 2 is the best, because with the defeat Philip lost Holland and he couldn't conquer England... [Int] "Sentence 2, because the consequences are more important than those in story 1... Story 1 is like a kind of detail..." (Raquel, yr 10, Sp 1, SA Q7).

Characteristic examples in this category set the issue more straightforwardly, either for the temporal or the partial / whole alternatives. María sees in both accounts a subdivision of 'the whole story' into discrete packages of time. For Mark it is a question of two sides of the matter. For Richard the relation is temporal; he recognizes that the relationship is not just contradiction, and he refuses to choose because maybe the two stories are partly end-on to each other.

[Wr] I think both are good, but one is after his [Alexander's] death and the other one is before his death, and each one has a different point of view about what happened (María, yr 8, Sp 1, AG Q6).

[Wr] We could look at the evidence we have and try looking at it from both points of view. [Int] "...The English and the Spanish... There is not right or wrong; it's just what they think" (Mark, yr 8, En 4, SA Q7).

[Wr] The one that is best is the one for which has the most evidence or maybe they could be linked together somehow. [Int] "One comes first -Story 1--, and then Story 2 comes second" (Richard, yr 8, En 5, SA Q7).

Some answers explicitly support a moderate position and try to look for "the middle point", the less partial or "the more complete" version:

[Int] "I can't decide, I need to have more information... Something in the middle..." (Natalie, yr 10, En 3, SA Q7).

[Int] "The one that tells more things, the more complete one" (Tito, yr 12, Sp 6, SA Q7).

[Int] "One in-between, a balance between both sides" (Sonia, yr 12, Sp 3, SA Q7).

At this level, though, responses become less confident about the ways to validate two rival accounts. Notions of perspectiveless neutrality and accuracy of evidence are present, but the two versions are not seen as contradictory, and students can overcome, to a certain extent, the limits of their teaching experiences when confronted with a history problem by similar means to those that historians themselves employ, such as the pursuit of consensus.

[Wr] I would have to use sources from around the time at the Armada from non-biased people. From somewhere not controlled by England or Spain. [Int] "I'm not sure which one... but one has to be more accurate" (Tom, yr 10, En 6, SA Q7).

[Wr] I don't know, I guess that I would accept the sentence or the version of history with which more historians agree. [Int] " I don't know, I've been taught one of them, that it was a decisive blow for Philip and his empire, I think 2 is more true, but I've heard about the other, as well... I'd need to see what neutral historians say" (Maite, yr 10, Sp 5, SA Q7).

Responses in this category, then, offer other claims for testing competing interpretations than just facts; there is also the awareness of authorship behind the accounts.

### **LEVEL 3: Aspectual: alternative interpretations**

Transitional responses from Level 2 to Level 3 are already aware, implicitly or explicitly, of the methodological problem which underlies the question of how you could decide which of two rival accounts is best.

[Wr] I think it is a fusion of both. Philip II kept on being the most powerful king in the world, but the defeat had also its importance, because they were not invincibles any more. [Int] "One doesn't need to exaggerate it so much nor to give justifications over what happened" (Javier, yr 10, Sp 2, SA Q7).

[Wr] By looking at the actual evidence there is concerning the status of Philip and the Empire after the defeat. You would have to analyze what his status was economically, religiously, administratively, etc., before and after, to assess which statement sums up the best answer. [Int] "Which is best? Would it be the one that uses the most factual evidence, or the one that has the better argument? Which one is the most convincing in putting the case forward?" (Jenny, yr 12, En 6, SA Q7).

Javier assumes different aspects as tacit criteria to decide over the two narratives, either the relative lack of importance of the event for the king, or the more important consequences for Spain's prestige. Jenny sees the task finally not as a question of lack of information, but as a matter of looking at the evidence which would better sustain the argument; the issue is viewed, therefore, as criterial, it depends on the criteria that are set to construct the account.

Characteristic responses in this category conceive the notion of point of view as structural to history writing and specify the criteria to evaluate the significance of an occurrence in two rival versions.

[Wr] By seeing which is spoken with hindsight, as this has investigated further into the chain of events that it set off and so can be considered a more informed decision. [Int] "I'd say Story 2 is the best, because it's taken from now looking back; it has more insight into the effects of it. Story 1 concentrates on the short term, it's not the same insight" (George, yr 10, En 5, SA Q7).

[Wr] I'd choose which one would be the best taking into account what is more important, whether religion or economy, which of the two is going to have greater repercussions in the history of Spain. [Int] "...which aspect is more important and which one has more consequences" (Angeles, yr 12, Sp 5, SA Q7).

George takes into account the temporal scale as story parameter, but goes beyond that; he proposes to study the defeat's consequences and gives explicitly the criterion of temporal perspective in the process of Spanish losses; he recognizes that significance changes according to perspectives in the short- or long-term. Angeles specifies one criterion as well: which *aspect* you are interested in; it is not totally clear if she still understands "the most important" in an absolute sense (i.e. 'what aspect is intrinsically more important in the history of Spain'), but her responses to other items reflect quite sophisticated ways of reasoning.

Among older students in this category, the issue of validity in history is explained by the usual dyad *fact / interpretation*. Some of them (see Charlotte and Israel, below) understand the notions following the positivist distinction of facts as ontologically stable whereas interpretations are unstable, although the shadow of a doubt tinges Alvaro's argument, below:

[Int] "Everybody may have a different point of view, but facts would still remain the same" (Charlotte, yr 10, En 2, SA Q7)

[Int] "We've got the essential data we've been given, they are there and they are clear, but opinions are necessary as well, they complement the data" (Israel, yr 12, Sp 5, SA Q7).

[Int] "Doing history objectively is rather difficult. Facts, O.K., may be objective, but depending on how you tell them... they may seem different things" (Alvaro, yr 12, Sp 4, AG Q6).

Others, English students above all, search for establishing an epistemological distinction between the two versions:

[Int] "They focus on different parts of the story... That's is why you can't say: 'this is the right view'... In story 1, they must have looked at the event and come to these conclusions; story 2 is just interpretation... You should be able to form your own opinion, in a history book, from the evidence you have read... It must have been like that... You never got a book with just 'facts'" (Chris, yr 12, En 2, SA Q7).

[Wr] (...) it is neither fact nor fiction, although I am taking it to mean long lasting as metaphorical, not actually still standing. [Int] "Statement 1 is more factual; statement 2 is harder to define" (Liz, yr 12, En 6, AG Q6).

[Wr] You can't as both are true. The wording "a decisive" setback however reminds readers that no one really knows 100% if the Armada was to blame for the financial difficulties. But in the 1st statement no one knows if the Armada 'did not prevent it' something else could have

ensured it. 2 is more of an opinion; 1 a fact; which may be wrong (Hannah, yr 12, En 2, SA Q7).

Responses like those above show a dissatisfaction with the somewhat simplistic opposition fact / interpretation, and they mean a reflection upon the different nature of both versions in terms of facts / something else; study the significance, they seem to say. If we compare these answers to other findings, Voss et al. (1998) found in his analysis of undergraduate students' ideas that they agreed that facts preceded explanation in all contexts (everyday notions, historical notions in abstract, historical notions applied to the particular case of the collapse of the Soviet Union), thereby suggesting that historical explanation occurs in a bottom-up manner. In contrast, some students in this sample hold the idea that the problem of assessing two rival accounts is not only a matter of research or finding out further information to contrast the facts; it is rather a question of definition of concepts: in what sense, for instance, Alexander's towns are considered, literally or metaphorically.

Finally, students answering at this level may consider the *intentions* of the author, the *scope* and *focus* of each account to evaluate their adequacy.

[Wr] I think both are important (...) they have different aims. If you think about a more global study of history, maybe sentence 1 would be more appropriate, but if you want to write about Alexander's life and deeds, then I consider sentence 2 more relevant (Guillem, yr 12, Sp 1, AG Q6).

[Int] "I don't think there's one best (...) In the context both are valid. At first, they seem antagonistic, but then they're not so" (Guillem, yr 12, Sp 1, SA Q7).

[Int] "It's hard to compare them... Which is best for what? I'm not sure what you mean by 'best'... It depends on what you want to use the sentence for, what you want to say" (Stuart, yr 10, En 3, AG Q6).

[Int] "I don't think you can decide which is best without having decided the focus point for the question... then you'd know which of the statements would help you best" (Lizzie, yr 12, En 5, AG Q6).

Guillem explains away the lack of consensus by showing that the conflict between interpretations, in both research tasks, is more apparent than real. Stuart appeals to abstract criteria to settle the issue in discussion ("what you want to use the sentence for"). Lizzie views the stories as tools for an argument, as seen above; different arguments need different tools. All these students can judge that criteria for testing facts and those for testing interpretations are not the same; they detect an active authorship behind the narratives and reckon that problems of validity and truth in history are never absolute, but contextual.

## Conclusions

The distribution of responses according to the proposed model of progression seems to fit the picture given by other studies in the field (Lee & Ashby, 1998, 15)<sup>8</sup>. Progression may be detected across categories *Factual clash*, *Partial / Temporal conflict* and *Aspectual: alternative interpretations*. Ideas that history is a compilation of information waiting to be found are held by a majority of students of age 12 to 15, although they can persist for a minority at 16-17. At 15 they are able to distinguish between different kinds of historical claims, and to recognize that different sorts of claim require different sorts of treatment. Questions of authorship and method in history writing are recognized by a majority of students at 16; some older students may assess variations of significance beyond the notion of aspect towards the idea of scope and focus in the narrative.

Pace of progression seems to be different across countries. Although the number of students at Level 3 is similar both in England and in Spain, progression in issues of validity and truth in relation to significance appears to occur at earlier stages in England (between year 8 and year 10) than in Spain (between year 10 and year 12).

The distinction between fact and interpretation appears more subtle among English students; the Spanish tend to take it more literally: year 10 and year 8 Spanish participants tend to speak more often about 'what really happened' than about abstract 'facts'.

There could be an influence of the task content in this question (SA Q7 / AG Q6), particularly among younger students. In the Alexander the Great task-set maybe the wording of the sentences led some students to think rather in factual terms than about methodological aspects. Conversely, the Spanish Armada content seems to facilitate the thinking about the author's role, making students' sense of partisanship more visible.

The "tendency to inflate disagreement" among students, pointed out by conclusions in the *Chata* Project (Lee & Ashby, 1998) is confirmed in this empirical analysis: rival accounts are treated as contradictory when they merely conflict, and as conflicting when they are competing<sup>9</sup>.

Teachers may well understand that although not all versions of the past have the same grounds, that does not mean they are false. However, the majority of students in year 8 and year 10 in both countries tend to disregard intermediate positions and are inclined to reduce 'validity' to the absolute problem of 'truth'. To the older students, this question looks much

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<sup>8</sup> Compare Graph 6.6 with Figure 6 (Lee & Ashby, 1998, 15) where categories *Factual*, *Multiple past* and *Criterial* are shown by year-groups.

<sup>9</sup> The relationship between accounts may be seen as *contradictory* "when they cannot be simultaneously accepted without logical contradiction"; as *conflicting* when "the acceptance of one version is at least implicitly a rejection of some part of the other"; or as *competing* when, appearing to discuss the same passage of the past, both versions set different parameters (Lee & Ashby, 1998).



more complex. This suggests that a common effort should be undertaken, both in England and Spain, towards the understanding (students' and teachers') that claims have to be evaluated in relation to the account, not simply as discrete facts.

## 7. TYPES OF SIGNIFICANCE

### 7.0. Introduction

Categories of progression with regard to types of significance have been outlined in Chapter 5, on the grounds of the distinction and variety of types of attributions and their association with contextuality. In Chapter 6, different notions were explored in relation to significance and history accounts (intrinsicity / contextuality; importance; emplotment and story parameters; point of view; validity and truth). In this chapter, our data will be analyzed to refine and complete the building of an empirical model of progression. It is hoped that this model will allow us to define more accurately and efficiently the development of students' ideas about significance in history, both in its relationship to accounts and in its variation by types.

As it was the case in the study of the notion of 'importance' (Chapter 6, section 6.2), here questions 1 and 2 in both tasks (*The Spanish Armada* and *Alexander the Great*) were also selected as the basis for our quantitative study, because of their specific characteristics. Question 1 was a totally open question (*Some historians think that the Spanish Armada's defeat / what Alexander did was really important; others think it wasn't. What do you think? Was it important or not? Explain why it mattered or why it did not matter*). Question 2 (*Does the Spanish Armada's defeat / what Alexander did matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?*) was a semi-open question that addressed directly the possible conflicting nature of two accounts, with regard to the significance of a historical event or process.

In our qualitative analysis, although the examples presented belong mainly to these two questions 1 and 2, complementary and problematic examples may also be drawn from other items and questions in both task-sets, to better illustrate our discussion about types of significance. These other items are: Questions 3 and 8 in the Spanish Armada set, and Questions 7, 8, and 9 in the Alexander set (see Appendices V and VI).

## 7.1. Types of significance and levels of progression

Following the classification of types of significance given in previous chapters, the first objective in our quantitative analysis is knowing the *number of responses that include each type or attribution*, by year group, country, task and question. Data are shown in Table 7.1 and Graph 7.1.

From these data several patterns emerge:

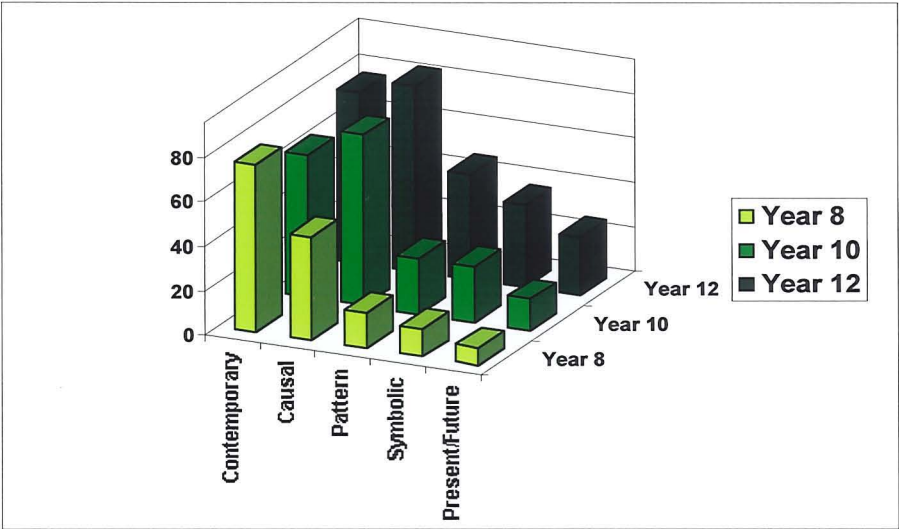
- a) The most frequent types of significance mentioned in students' responses are *contemporary* and *causal*, this being the case in both countries and across different content in all year groups.
- b) Contemporary significance is the type most frequently indicated among younger students (year 8), by a considerable margin over other types, including causal significance. It is even more frequent in the Alexander tasks than in the Spanish Armada set, and slightly more frequent among Spanish students of all grades in the Alexander set.
- c) *Pattern* significance ranks third in all three year groups, but the proportion of responses is much higher in year 12 than in year 10 or year 8. Across countries, the pattern type is better represented among English participants of all grades in the Alexander tasks, whereas it is represented by almost the same number of responses in the Spanish Armada tasks. Yet it is interesting to note that while there is exactly the same number of answers in year 8 and year 10 in both countries, in year 12 the proportion is higher within the Spanish group in the Armada set.
- d) *Symbolic* significance is the fourth type in frequency of answers both in England and Spain, but it shows a very much higher number of responses among English students. In this particular feature, differences across countries are striking in both task-sets.
- e) Significance *for the present and the future* is the least frequently represented among all students, particularly the younger, including those of year 10. Nonetheless, there are variations across countries. As in the case of symbolic significance, the relation with the present is almost absolutely ignored among Spanish students in years 8 and 10, and only one sixth of year 12 students allude to it, whereas a small proportion of English students in the lower grades and half of students in year 12 do mention this kind of significance.

**TABLE 7.1.** Number of responses by year group and country for each type of significance

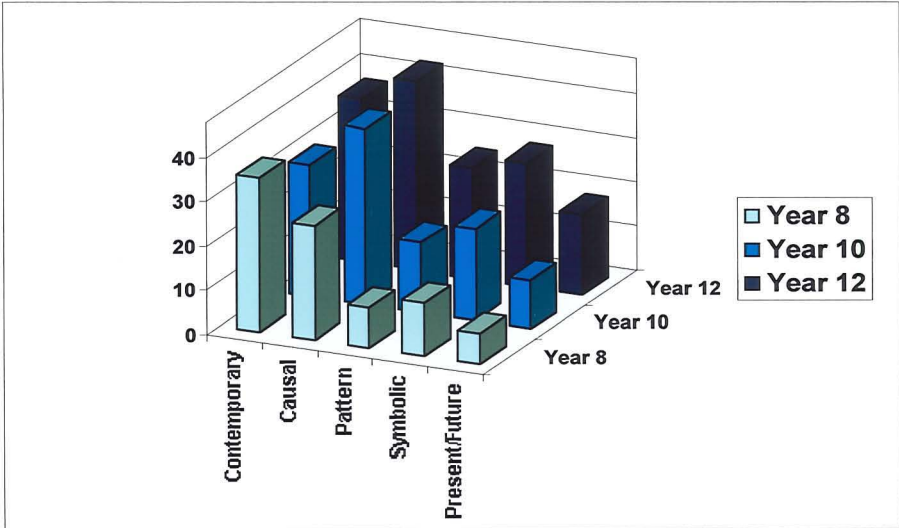
<u>Question 1</u>		Yr 8			Yr 10			Yr 12		
		En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total
CS	SA	15	17	32	12	12	24	17	16	33
	AG	20	24	44	18	22	40	20	24	44
	TOTAL	35	41	<b>76</b>	30	34	<b>64</b>	37	40	<b>77</b>
CA	SA	16	14	30	22	21	43	22	20	42
	AG	10	7	17	18	16	34	21	20	41
	TOTAL	26	21	<b>47</b>	40	37	<b>77</b>	43	40	<b>83</b>
PA	SA	3	3	6	8	7	15	12	14	26
	AG	6	4	10	8	2	10	13	8	21
	TOTAL	9	7	<b>16</b>	16	9	<b>25</b>	25	22	<b>47</b>
SY	SA	5	0	5	6	3	9	14	5	19
	AG	7	1	8	15	1	16	14	4	18
	TOTAL	12	1	<b>13</b>	21	4	<b>25</b>	28	9	<b>37</b>
PF	SA	3	1	4	5	1	6	6	4	10
	AG	4	0	4	6	2	8	12	4	16
	TOTAL	7	1	<b>8</b>	11	3	<b>14</b>	18	8	<b>26</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)**TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)**CS** = contemporary**CA** = causal**PA** = pattern**SY** = symbolic**PF** = present / future

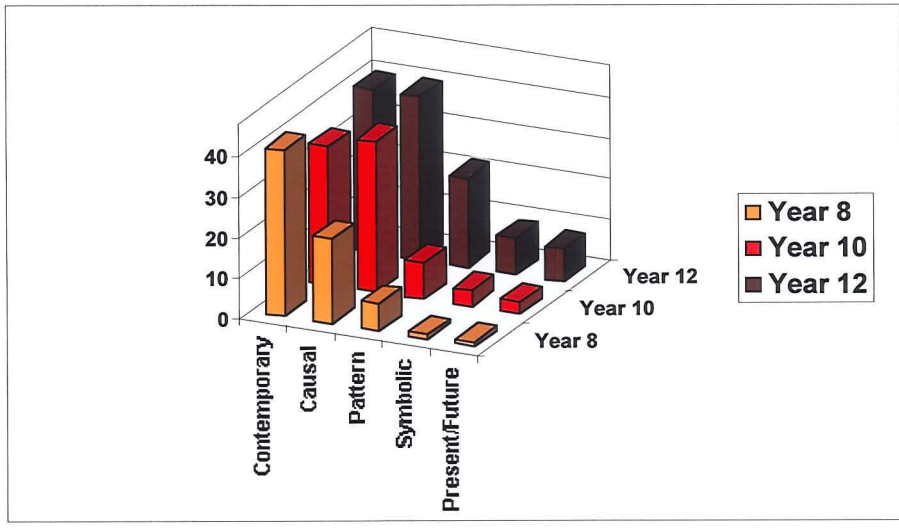
**GRAPH 7.1 (TABLE 7.1) TYPES OF SIGNIFICANCE QUESTION 1**



**TOTAL**



**ENGLISH**



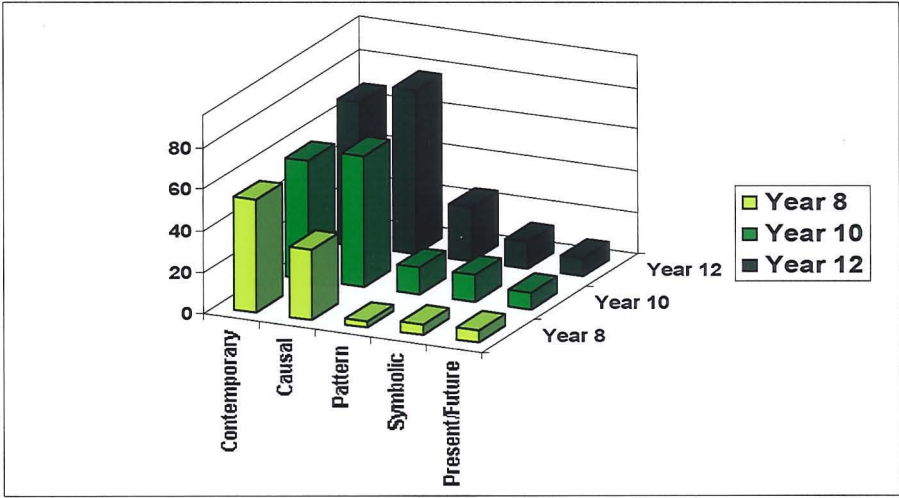
**SPANISH**

**TABLE 7.2.** Number of responses by year group and country for each type of significance

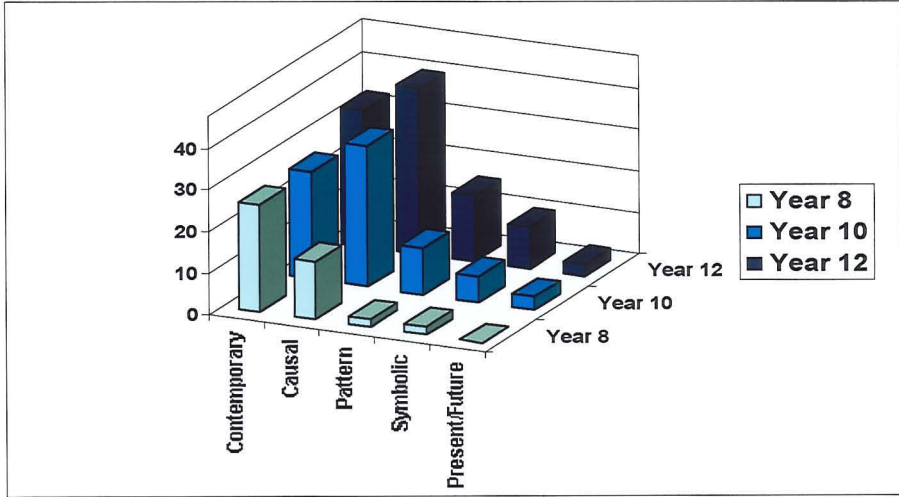
<u>Question 2</u>		Yr 8			Yr 10			Yr 12		
		En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total
CS	SA	17	12	29	15	14	29	19	19	38
	AG	19	16	35	11	17	28	14	17	31
	TOTAL	26	28	<b>54</b>	26	31	<b>57</b>	33	36	<b>69</b>
CA	SA	9	12	21	20	17	37	21	21	42
	AG	5	8	13	14	12	26	19	18	37
	TOTAL	14	20	<b>34</b>	34	29	<b>63</b>	40	39	<b>79</b>
PA	SA	2	1	3	8	2	10	13	10	23
	AG	0	0	0	3	0	3	3	0	3
	TOTAL	2	1	<b>3</b>	11	2	<b>13</b>	16	10	<b>26</b>
SY	SA	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
	AG	1	3	4	5	7	12	9	3	12
	TOTAL	2	3	<b>5</b>	6	7	<b>13</b>	10	3	<b>13</b>
PF	SA	0	2	2	1	1	2	0	2	2
	AG	0	4	4	2	4	6	3	4	7
	TOTAL	0	6	<b>6</b>	3	5	<b>8</b>	3	6	<b>9</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)**TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)**CS** = contemporary**CA** = causal**PA** = pattern**SY** = symbolic**PF** = present / future

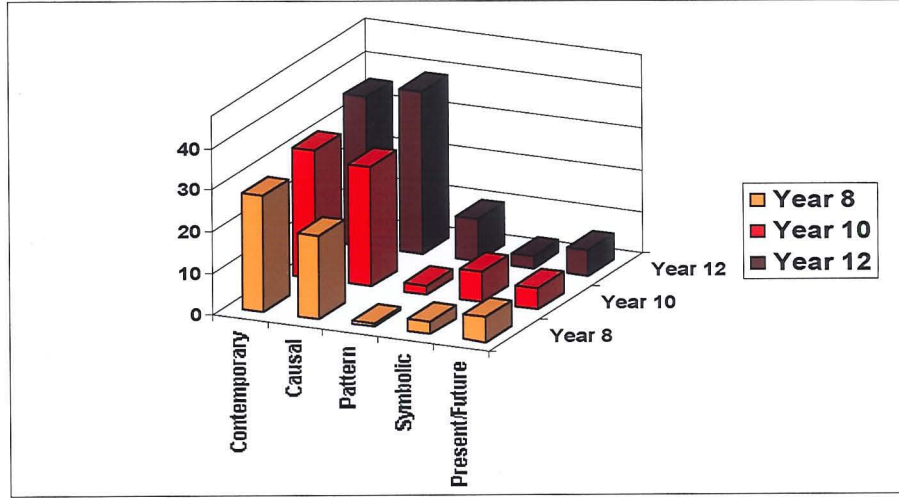
**GRAPH 7.2 (TABLE 7.2)    TYPES OF SIGNIFICANCE  
QUESTION 2**



**TOTAL**



**ENGLISH**



**SPANISH**

These data were cross-referenced with students' answers to Question 2. Since the nature of the item is different, because it is a semi-open question that specifically asks about the consideration of a possible conflict between two accounts, it was expected that some variation in patterns would arise from this second item. In fact, several differences are worth exposing here, in view of Table 7.2. and Graph 7.2.

- a) Contemporary and causal types of significance continue to be the most frequently mentioned, but causal is more frequent than contemporary in year 12 and year 10 in England and only in year 12 in Spain. This confirms students' tendency to work in contemporary or causal terms when explaining the significance of an event or process, either in the contexts of an open or a semi-open question.
- b) Unlike in Question 1, in Question 2 significance for the present and the future is better represented among Spanish students in the case of the Alexander task-set, even among younger students; no year 8 English pupil mentioned this type in Question 2.
- c) In all grades and in both countries (with the exception of year 12 Spanish students) all types of significance are much less frequently mentioned in Question 2 than in Question 1, something probably due to students' economy of answers: if they had already made their point in a previous answer, why should they bother about repeating it a second time? This might be the main reason why responses to Question 1 are richer in the distinction of attributions of significance. With these exceptions, the patterns delineated for Question 1 can be corroborated in Question 2.

Notwithstanding the findings charted above, a further cross-reference was done to check the general patterns that had been defined. In order to appreciate the impact of the 'double mention' effect, described above to explain differences of proportion of students across Questions 1 and 2, data were accumulated from both items. Graph 7.3 and Table 7.3 show the number of pupils who use a particular type of significance either in Question 1 or in Question 2. This gives a clearer picture of the number of students who give indication of having available in their conceptual armoury any particular kinds of significance.

The general trends that were presented for Question 1 are corroborated by the accumulated data charted in Table 7.3 and Graph 7.3.

- a) Again, the most frequent notions are contemporary and causal significance. Contemporary significance is mentioned by the majority of students in all year groups, in both countries and across task-sets. Causal significance is alluded to by more than half of the younger students, a majority of year 10 students and almost all students from year 12.



**TABLE 7.3.** Number of students who use a particular notion of significance in Question 1 or in Question 2 by year group, country and task-set

<u>Question 1 /</u>		Yr 8			Yr 10			Yr 12		
<u>Question 2</u>		En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total
CS	SA	21	20	41	16	18	34	22	19	41
	AG	21	24	45	18	23	41	19	24	43
	TOTAL	42	44	86	34	41	75	41	43	86
CA	SA	20	15	35	22	22	44	24	23	47
	AG	10	11	21	19	19	38	23	22	45
	TOTAL	30	26	56	41	41	82	47	45	91
PA	SA	4	3	7	9	9	18	15	18	33
	AG	6	4	10	9	2	11	15	8	23
	TOTAL	10	7	17	18	11	29	30	26	56
SY	SA	5	0	5	6	3	9	19	5	24
	AG	7	4	11	17	8	25	15	4	19
	TOTAL	12	4	16	23	11	34	34	9	43
PF	SA	3	1	4	5	2	7	6	5	11
	AG	2	4	6	6	6	12	14	10	24
	TOTAL	5	5	10	11	8	19	20	15	35

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

**CS** = contemporary

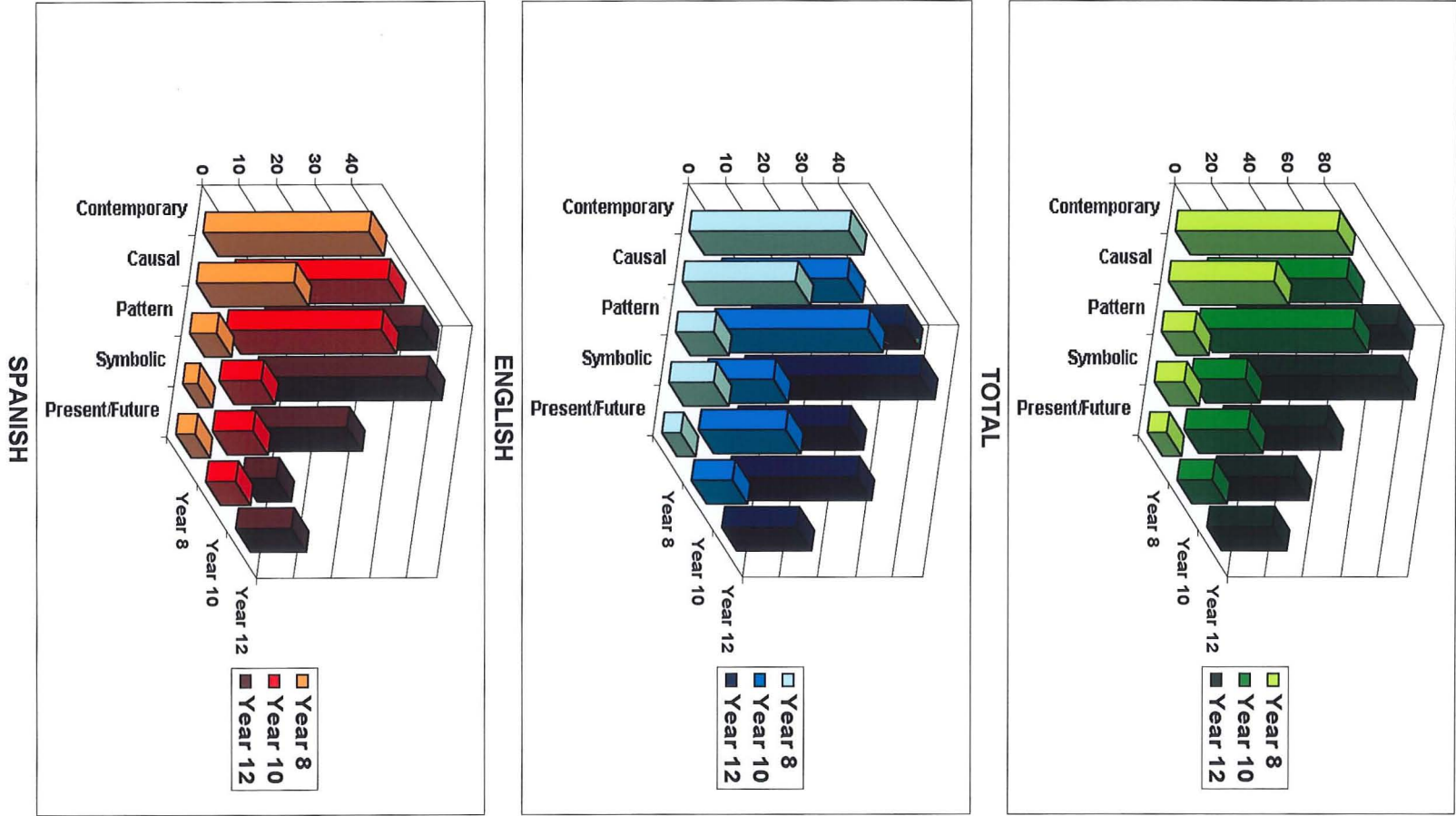
**CA** = causal

**PA** = pattern

**SY** = symbolic

**PF** = present / future

GRAPH 7.3 (TABLE 7.3) TYPES OF SIGNIFICANCE  
QUESTION 1 - QUESTION 2



b) Pattern, symbolic and significance for the present and the future rank third, fourth and fifth, respectively, in year 8 and year 12; as an exception, on this basis the symbolic type scored higher than pattern for year 10 English students. Since data here have been accumulated, all three notions present a slightly higher number of mentions in all year groups; this trend is more noticeable in year 12.

c) Two of the findings we highlighted above are clearly confirmed in this chart: i) symbolic significance and significance for the present and future are *always* more frequently mentioned by the English students than by the Spanish ones; ii) pattern significance is more often alluded in all year groups and tasks by the English students, with one *exception*: the Spanish students from year 12 in the Armada set employed this idea slightly more frequently than the English ones, as was the case in Question 1.

Analysis suggests, then, that pattern and symbolic notions of significance and significance for the present and future may be considered as possible *indicators of progression* in historical understanding. Usually, pupils who mention some of those three types do mention contemporary and / or causal types as well. Contemporary and causal notions may be seen as a pre-requisite for a more complete perception of significance in history. Likewise, this was confirmed by students' distribution of responses to Question 1, according to Table 7.4.

This chart shows how the idea of progression in types of significance described above is empirically grounded. It is the older students who tend to mention a greater variability of types. A third of students from year 8, almost half of students from year 10 and the majority of those from year 12 who mentioned pattern, symbolic or 'connection with the present' notions of significance did also suggest contemporary or causal notions in their responses. This could be interpreted as indicating that these students reached particular levels of understanding, but went beyond those to achieve more sophisticated modes<sup>1</sup>.

Based on these general features, a second stage in a detailed analysis of all responses followed in our quest for the description of a level-scale model of progression. Categorization of responses to Questions 1 and 2 coded for types of significance as well as for issues of intrinsicality or contextuality and evaluation of importance in connection to accounts (see Chapter 5). Our model of progression evolved, then, from 'importance' linked to accounts to 'importance' associated at the same time to 'types', or variation of attributions of significance. The findings described above showed that the number of responses by year group and types of significance other than contemporary and causal could be interpreted as

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<sup>1</sup> It is *not* asserted here that pattern, symbolic and present/future types *themselves* are higher levels than contemporary and causal, but that possession of a richer armoury of concepts to handle significance certainly *is*.

an indicator of cognitive progression. This led us to disregard internal variations in contemporary and causal attributions, that is, variations within types (e.g. differentiation of short- and long-term consequences in causal significance) in pursuit of variations across attributions<sup>2</sup>.

In the consideration of variety of types of significance, then, contemporary and causal alone were located at a lower level than the rest of types, even if internal variations in the former occurred. A second indicator of progression was the consideration of significance as variable within or between attributions or types of significance. Therefore, variable significance between accounts is always regarded at a higher level than fixed significance, even if only the contemporary and the causal types are indicated. This categorization of levels will be combined and integrated with those proposed in Chapter 6 to construct our final model of progression of pupils' ideas about significance in history.

**TABLE 7.4.** Number of responses that mention contemporary/causal and pattern/symbolic/present-future types of significance in Question 1, by year group, country and task-set

<u>Question 1</u>	Yr 8			Yr 10			Yr 12		
	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total
SA	9	4	13	12	10	22	21	18	39
AG	8	4	12	18	5	23	19	12	31
TOTAL	17	8	<b>25</b>	30	15	<b>45</b>	40	30	<b>70</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**TOTAL** (24 x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that internal variations within attributions are not studied. Examples will be analyzed below, as part of the qualitative study of this chapter, and the specific category of story parameters, which included this kind of variation within types, was already discussed in Chapter 6, section 6.3.2, p. 147.

Bearing those reasons in mind, the model of progression in types of significance was defined as follows:

- **LEVEL 1: No allusion to any type of significance**
- **LEVEL 2: Intrinsic and single significance**
- **LEVEL 3: Fixed contextual significance: significance is fixed within / across attributions (contemporary and causal only or single significance other than contemporary)**
- **LEVEL 4: Fixed contextual significance: significance is fixed within / across attributions (besides or other than contemporary and causal)**
- **LEVEL 5: Variable contextual significance: significance varies within / across attributions**
  - 5.1: contemporary and causal**
  - 5.2: besides or other than contemporary and causal**

Students' responses were charted according to this scale, as shown in Table 7.5 and Graph 7.4. Progression is charted according to: a) the consideration of fixed versus variable significance; b) the variety of types of significance represented in the number of responses for each group, and according to the specific types of significance touched at each year group; pattern, symbolic and significance for the present and the future indicate a higher degree of elaboration in historical thinking.

The main features of the table and graph might be interpreted as follows:

- a) The lowest level in the scale (Level 1) applies to a very small proportion of answers, and only responses from year 8 and year 10 fall into this classification ('No allusion to any type of significance'). No year 12 students in either country are categorized at this level.
- b) Level 2 ('Intrinsic and single significance'), however, includes a third of students from year 8, the Spanish ones in a bigger proportion. No English student in year 12 reasons at this level, and there are only two cases in Spain. The only possible single significance associated to intrinsicality is the contemporary type, according to the coding system devised in this work. From these data it can be inferred that there is a much stronger tendency in younger students than in older ones to justify issues of significance exclusively in contemporary terms.

**TABLE 7.5.** Number of responses for each level of progression in types of significance by grade, country and task-set

<b>Question 1</b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>SA</b>	2	3	5	1	1	2	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	3	3	<b>6</b>	1	2	<b>3</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>SA</b>	5	9	14	0	2	2	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	7	14	21	1	5	6	0	2	2
	<b>TOTAL</b>	12	23	<b>35</b>	1	7	<b>8</b>	0	2	<b>2</b>
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>SA</b>	9	6	15	8	8	16	3	3	6
	<b>AG</b>	6	4	10	3	10	13	4	7	11
	<b>TOTAL</b>	15	10	<b>25</b>	11	18	<b>29</b>	7	10	<b>17</b>
<b>Level 4</b>	<b>SA</b>	7	4	11	10	10	20	12	10	22
	<b>AG</b>	7	3	10	10	3	13	9	9	18
	<b>TOTAL</b>	14	7	<b>21</b>	20	13	<b>33</b>	21	19	<b>40</b>
<b>Level 5</b>	<b>SA</b>	1	2	3	6	3	9	8	11	19
	<b>AG</b>	3	3	6	9	5	14	12	6	18
	<b>TOTAL</b>	4	5	<b>9</b>	15	8	<b>23</b>	20	17	<b>37</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**Σ TOTAL** (24 students x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

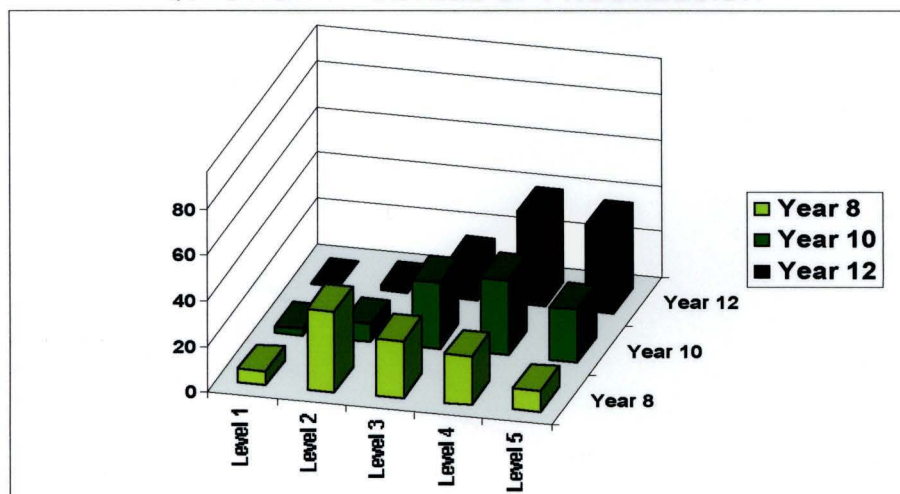
c) Level 3 ('Fixed contextual significance: contemporary and causal only') includes a very small minority of answers which mention only one type of significance (other than contemporary) and a majority of answers which explain significance in terms of consequences and/or contemporary terms. Almost a third of answers in year 10 fall into this level, but Spanish year 10 pupils are better represented in it than the English ones. Most answers from English year 10 pupils fall into Level 4. For year 8, less than a quarter of Spanish responses and a third of English ones correspond to Level 3. Almost one fifth of responses from year 12 belong to Level 3, again in a bigger proportion in Spain.

d) Almost half of responses from year 12 are classified under Level 4 ('fixed contextual significance: besides or other than contemporary and causal'). For English students from year 10 this level is first in number of answers and for year 8 it is third (after Level 2 and Level 3). Twice as many year 8 English students belong to this level as Spanish year 8 students. The distribution of responses that include different types of significance apart from contemporary and causal seem to confirm the meaning given to these types as indicators of higher levels of ideas.

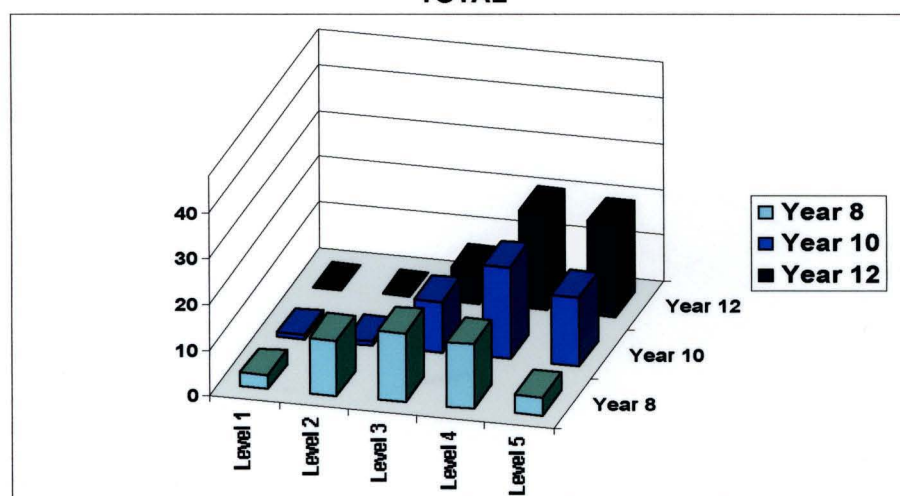
e) Level 5 ('Variable contextual significance; 5.1: contemporaries and causal; 5.2: besides or other than contemporary and causal') is linked to the category that evaluates significance according to variations of nature and degree ('Variable contextual importance', Level 5; see Chapter 6, section 6.2, p. 130). It corresponds to a third of responses from year 12, this time in a higher proportion for the English ones in the Alexander set; in the Armada set, the proportion is slightly higher for the Spanish. Less than a fifth of responses from Year 10 (most from English pupils) and a tiny sample from year 8 (again, most from English pupils) may be allocated to Level 5. As the distribution in number of responses show, English students reach the last levels of progression (Level 4 and Level 5) in a higher proportion than Spanish students in year 10 and year 12.

The same analysis was done in Question 2, categorizing the students' answers according to their awareness of context, their consideration of importance as fixed or variable, and their mention of types of significance, to refine and explore further our model of progression (see Table 7.6 and Graph 7.5).

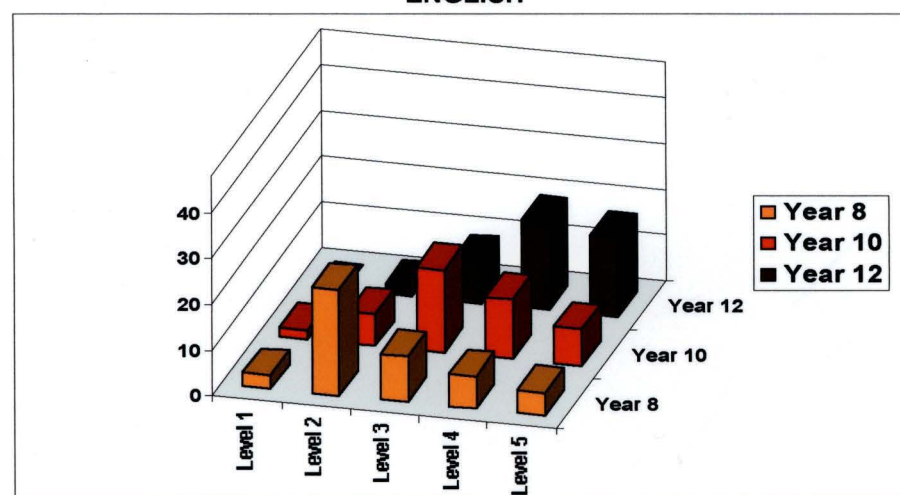
**GRAPH 7.4 (TABLE 7.5) TYPES OF SIGNIFICANCE  
QUESTION 1 – LEVELS OF PROGRESSION**



**TOTAL**



**ENGLISH**



**SPANISH**



**TABLE 7.6.** Number of responses for each level of progression in types of significance by grade, country and task-set

<b>Question 2</b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>SA</b>	5	4	9	2	1	3	0	1	1
	<b>AG</b>	1	2	3	2	3	5	0	1	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	6	6	<b>12</b>	4	4	<b>8</b>	0	2	<b>2</b>
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>SA</b>	8	4	12	0	2	2	0	0	0
	<b>AG</b>	7	6	13	3	2	5	1	3	4
	<b>TOTAL</b>	15	10	<b>25</b>	3	4	<b>7</b>	1	3	<b>4</b>
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>SA</b>	5	8	13	5	11	16	4	4	8
	<b>AG</b>	14	7	21	3	4	7	4	3	7
	<b>TOTAL</b>	19	15	<b>34</b>	8	15	<b>23</b>	8	7	<b>15</b>
<b>Level 4</b>	<b>SA</b>	1	1	2	2	0	2	2	0	2
	<b>AG</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	1	1	<b>2</b>	2	0	<b>2</b>	2	0	<b>2</b>
<b>Level 5</b>	<b>SA</b>	5	7	12	15	10	25	18	19	37
	<b>AG</b>	2	9	11	16	15	31	19	17	36
	<b>TOTAL</b>	7	16	<b>23</b>	31	25	<b>56</b>	37	36	<b>73</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

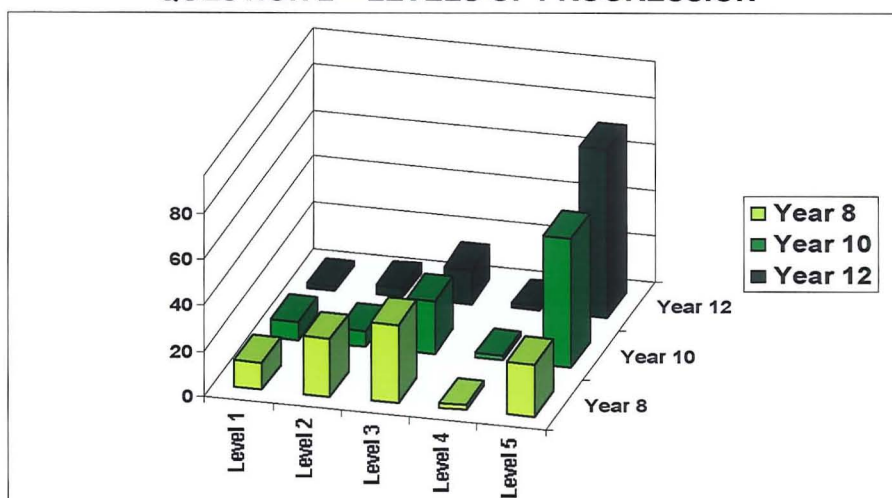
**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

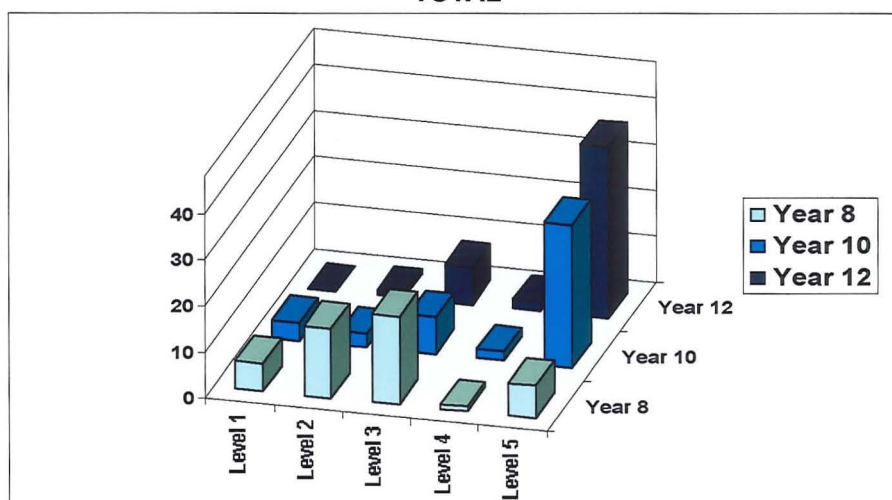
**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**Σ TOTAL** (24 students x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

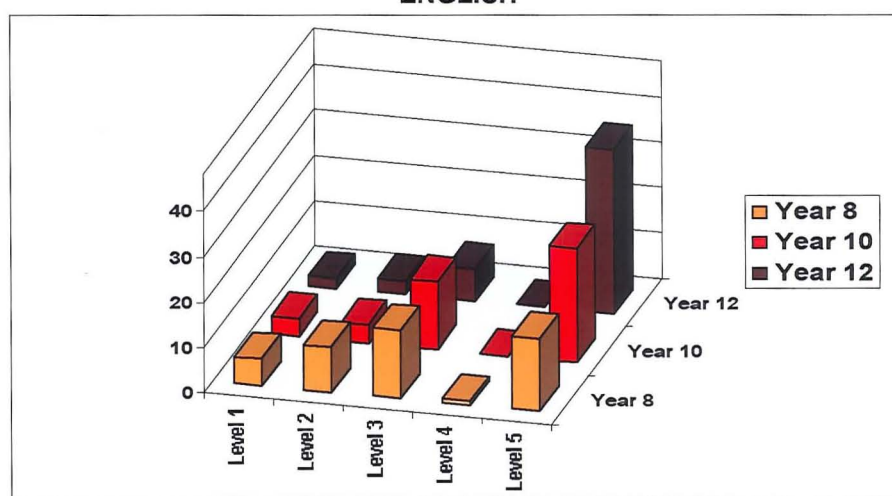
**GRAPH 7.5 (TABLE 7.6) TYPES OF SIGNIFICANCE  
QUESTION 2 – LEVELS OF PROGRESSION**



**TOTAL**



**ENGLISH**



**SPANISH**

General trends for Levels 1, 2 and 3 were corroborated in the answers to a semi-open question as Question 2 was. Yet some differences should be noted, especially for Levels 4 and 5. First, there is a rise in the number of pupils that could be categorized in Level 1, where no mention of any type of significance was made. This could be explained, as above, as a matter of economy of answers. Second, responses pertaining to Level 4 drop dramatically, probably because of the nature of the question itself, which asked directly for comparison of two different contexts. Then many students evaluate the significance of content as variable across the two stories, and justify this by the distinction of types of attributions, or by internal distinction within a type of attribution. That explains the higher number of cases under Level 5, especially in year 10 and year 12. Half of the responses from year 10 and the majority of answers from year 12 fall now into the highest level.

Multidimensional frequency analysis was performed for Question 1, to avoid the effect introduced by the sudden drop of responses for Level 4 in Question 2. As for Importance, the overall test of independence shows that the combination of the three variables, *Level*, *year* and *country* is affecting the results, and indicates that variables are not independent ( $X^2=5.18$ ,  $df=8$ ). The positive correlation between level and year is clearly evident in the figures in Table 7.5, e.g. year 8 is heavily weighted for level 2 and 3, year 10 for level 4 and year 12 for levels 4 and 5. Progression is demonstrated, therefore, on the basis of the distinction of types of significance in students' responses within each year group ( $X^2=81.36$ ,  $df=8$ ). Stronger proportions of older students in the higher levels, and of younger students in the lower ones indicate so. However, it is also necessary to remember that several students from year 10 and a few students from year 8 did reach Level 5 in Question 1. This means that sophisticated ideas can be developed from early ages, in the context of an open question, in our particular historical second order concept. Apart from this, the impact of the kind of question is apparent. Pressure on students to make comparisons indicated that more of them are willing and able to consider significance as variable than would appear if no such pressure is encountered. Finally, a general trend should be noted: English students tend to reach more sophisticated levels of understanding at an earlier age and in a higher number than Spanish ones ( $X^2=15.96$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). These interactions, as in Importance, are mostly ascribed to differences at year 10.  $X^2$  analysis of data grouped by year is presented in Table 7.7. It shows a significant association between level and country, again for year 10 ( $X^2=10.6$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). For this year, English students reach higher levels of progression than Spanish ones. This corroborates similar findings in participants' ideas about significance in relation to accounts discussed in the previous chapter.

**TABLE 7.7.** Types of significance: X<sup>2</sup> analysis by year group in Question 1.

Level vs. Country	Yr 8	Yr 10	Yr 12
X <sup>2</sup>	6.88	10.6	0.86
p		* < 0.05	

## 7.2. Levels of progression: discussion of examples

Our next step will be to consider concrete examples across age groups and countries which reveal internal variations and degree of sophistication within each level. In addition, specific problems of categorization with regard to types of significance and levels of progression will be discussed.

### LEVEL 1: No allusion to any type of significance

This level is analogous to category 1: 'Importance is not an issue' in the notion of *Importance* (as discussed in Chapter 6, section 6.2, p. 130). It may involve problems of general comprehension, linked also to the first subcategory through the notion of *Intrinsicality / Contextuality*. In the following examples, significance is viewed as fixed, attached to the occurrence in itself; a historical moral views are predominant (e.g., in James' example below, significance seems to be attached to general features about what a king should be expected to do); sometimes the explanation is constructed by means of disconnected events, with no clear relation to the occurrence that is being treated (e.g. Eva's example below). There is no mention of any type of significance, and explanations are usually established in everyday terms, with no reference to the concrete stories or to the historical context in general (e.g., Carl and Allan below).

[Wr] No, because if they didn't want Elizabeth as queen of England, they needn't make a war because of that, that is why so many ships of the Spanish fleet were lost. [Int] "England and Spain were confronted. Great Britain became independent... Spanish was spoken more than Chinese and English..." (Eva, yr 10, Sp 3, SA Q1).

[Wr] One person had to be king so he should have got the Greek land and left it there (James, yr 8, En 4, AG Q1).

[Wr] I don't think it was important for Armada's defeat because the Spanish should keep what they have and leave England alone. The Spanish should never come over to England in the first place. (Carl, yr 8, En 5, SA Q1).

[Wr] Well it does matter because Britain and even Spain should be best of friends, instead of fighting, that Britain just want peace but when another country come over to attack we will try to talk to them first and if they don't listen then we will attack (there should be all around the world) (Allan, yr 10, En 2, SA Q1).

These kinds of responses do not code for contemporary significance, because students here speak in a-historical terms, with neither implicit nor obvious approach to the perspectives of the contemporaries. This latter feature, when mentioned in isolation, will be a major indicator for Level 2.

## **LEVEL 2: Intrinsic and single significance**

This level entails a consideration of significance as fixed, in intrinsic terms, measured always by the contemporary type. It corresponds to the category 'Intrinsic importance: single significance' in the notion of *Importance*. Level 2 is more frequent, in all year groups, among Spanish students and in the Alexander task-set. A wide range of elaboration in ideas, nevertheless, underlies the rigid limitation of levels. But what is definitory here is the capacity of students for seeing the notion of significance exclusively in the contemporaries' terms.

[Wr] What Alexander did was important, because he invaded Asia Minor and he kept winning victory time after time. (Yetti, yr 8, En 2, AG Q1).

[Wr] Yes, he is important, because he gained a lot of land and he made studies, as the second text indicates. He could gather so many territories because the Persian Empire was very powerful in those days. [Int] "Nobody else could equal the Empire he had. The Persian Empire had a reputation of being very well disciplined warriors; the Macedonians were also like that" (Manuel, yr 12, Sp 1, AG Q1).

Here significance is assessed by the fact of the conquests and victories, not by the implications of those (at least, explicitly); it is considered intrinsically, attached to the importance of the conquest in itself, not with reference to one or various context(s). A

more elaborated understanding of contemporaries' views is given by Cristina, who adds a reflection about change:

[Wr] I think so, because in those days Spain was the biggest Empire and it was difficult to defeat her, and then there was a catastrophe, because due to the bad weather that armada was destroyed. [Int] "It changed their way of thinking... the Spanish, the English, the Dutch... those who were affected" (Cristina, yr 8, Sp 1, SA Q1).

Unlike in the script, which exposes a clear intrinsicality, in her interview data she assesses importance in connection to the contemporaries' change of attitudes. This category does not value the internal variations within contexts as first criterion, but the distinction of types of significance. And Cristina could be offering more than the type categorized as contemporary, because in her view there is a 'before' and 'after' marked by the defeat, that is, a pattern notion. Therefore, Cristina's response was classified under Level 4. Some other problems may arise in the task of categorization by types of significance, as is shown by the next example.

[Wr] They are right what they said about Alexander, he was doing the right thing for his country. He helped his men through danger and he was doing this for his people to show that he's a hero (Allan, yr 10, En 2, AG Q1).

Does Allan interpret importance as fixed with no reference to a historical context, therefore, is he reasoning in tautological terms, i.e. Alexander was important because he was a great king? Should we read beyond, and accept a symbolic sense in his last sentence? Or should we take that symbolic sense embedded in the contemporary type? Our decision leant towards a 'literal' reading, which contemplates Alexander's own times only, taking into account his use of tenses and the lack of further evidence.

**LEVEL 3: Fixed contextual significance: significance is fixed within / across attributions (contemporary and causal only or single significance other than contemporary)**

The bulk of answers within this level are categorized as 'causal only' or 'contemporary and causal in association'. As we saw above --and it was expected--, for a majority of pupils significance may be reduced to the attribution of 'importance' (in connection with causal weighting or not), that is, issues of significance of an occurrence in history are mainly explained by its consequences, in general terms. This is even more frequent in Question 2; around half of responses in all year groups belong to this level, the Spanish sample being in a slightly higher proportion in all grades. Variation in the degree of sophistication within

this level is considerable, ranging from ideas that are very close to intrinsicity, where contemporary significance and immediate causal types of significance can be very difficult to define and disentangle (Pupinder, below), to ideas about causation that include different time scales and aspects (Clare, below).

[Wr] I think it was important what Alexander had done, because it was what his father was going to do, but he died, or it could be that Alexander wanted more power and wanted a bigger empire. [Int] "Yes, he made Greece a popular and powerful country" (Pupinder, yr 10, En 3, AG Q1).

[Wr] It was important that Alexander spread his armies over a large area as it spread the knowledge of the Macedonians to many people and places. [Int] "... spread of Greek culture... They had a lot of knowledge, didn't they?" (Clare, yr 12, En 5, AG Q1).

In the first example, the evaluation of importance starts from a previous state of affairs; he makes a connection with consequences, but significance is the same across attributions; in the second example, significance is seen across different time-scales; immediate (spread of armies) and long-term (spread of knowledge), but within a single type: causal. The highest degree of sophistication within this type is noticed in responses that combine different kinds of causation (immediate, short-, long-term; different aspects) with an awareness of the conflict between stories. This kind will be grouped under Level 5.1, the lower category of the highest level of progression.

Level 3 also includes some very few responses that mention one single type of significance, but go beyond contemporary or causal:

[Wr] I think it did matter, because other leaders could follow in his footsteps and do the same things, and become more powerful. [Int] "Other people learned from what he did" (Jamie, yr 10, En 3, AG Q1).

[Wr] It did matter, because Spain started to get weaker and to lose colonies [Int] "Thus the loss of the Spanish Empire begun, to me that is the most important thing" (Daniel K., yr 10, Sp 6, SA Q1).

Those two responses codify for single significance: symbolic in the first example, pattern in the second one. Both operate beyond causal reasoning: Jamie sees Alexander's deeds in its symbolic sense: that of 'example', and Daniel views the Armada's defeat as a turning-point in the process of Spanish weakening (what is important is not the event of the defeat, but the process of Spanish decline, he seems to imply). The classification of examples like this is difficult but, again, priority has been given to the distinction of types of significance. That is why Jamie and Daniel's answers were coded at Level 3, as fixed contextual significance.

Hard decisions must be made also about level ascription in *transitional* cases, such as the following:

[Wr] I think it mattered that Spain tried to invade England, because they wanted to have more land which belonged to England. [Int] "Philip had to give land back... Elizabeth, she was like all victorious... Philip didn't want to try again, lost confidence... he wouldn't try again" (Darren, yr 8, En 5, SA Q1).

In the written task, no consequences are mentioned, importance is measured in terms of intentions, rather than consequences; Darren highlights the intrinsic importance not of the defeat itself, but of the fact that Philip tried to invade somebody else's lands, something he was not entitled to. Yet in the interview, he mentions short-term consequences for Philip and Elizabeth. In cases like this, the higher level is codified.

Other problematic issues arise in the interpretation of students' minds and language:

[Wr] I don't think the defeat of the Spanish Armada was really important. It hasn't helped *us* in any way. To be honest, I don't really see the point in fighting. And one way or another war has something to do with religion. [Int] "It matters in a way, because it made other countries realize that they didn't need Philip as ruler, they could cope themselves" (Ceri, yr 8, En 5, SA Q1, stress added).

Is Ceri taking 'us' in historical terms or in her own terms? Does 'us' mean 'we English at any particular moment,' 'people in the Armada's days' or 'we English of our present times'? Should we define her notions of significance as related to the present, thus confronting *our* views with those of contemporaries? Interview data seem to tip the scales in favour of the contemporaries' reaction --with a hint of the 'symbolic' type of attribution-- rather than considering a connection with the present.

Isolating types of significance, then, is not a clear-cut matter. It is particularly thorny when a choice must be made between long-term consequences (causal significance) and the idea of trend or turning point in a pattern of change (pattern significance).

[Wr] I think it was important because he could spread his empire over many lands. Because the towns he founded had a variety of races. Because the Greek culture, a very important one, could spread over many lands. [Int] "Yes, if he conquered so many lands, and brought the Greek culture to lots of places... that culture has been very important..." (Sandra, yr 12, Sp 6, AG Q1).

[Wr] I feel that it was important as it acted to calm fears over Queen Elizabeth's capabilities and right to the throne, and thus helped in



instigating a very stable and prosperous era in British history. It also acted to introduce fears over King Philip II's skill as the king and, I believe, that this would have been unavoidable owing to the Armada's humiliation, as people generally need someone to blame. [Int] "We didn't study the long-term effects, we studied about the launching of the Armada in itself, not in as much detail as in this" (George, yr 10, En 5, SA Q1).

Could these responses be seen as examples of something else than causal significance? In the first case, Sandra seems to interpret Alexander's deeds as an implicit turning point in the pattern of development of the Greek culture, but her words do not allow us to be certain about that interpretation. George seems to be thinking in a quite strong causal way, at different time-scales (psychological effects on each side, mid-term consequences for England); but at the same time he appears to be pondering the Armada's defeat as a point of inflexion in the development of a "prosperous era in British history", and his phrases "helped in instigating", "acted to introduce" may respond to the consideration of the defeat as the beginning of a process of change. The former example would recognize contemporary and causal types, and it would belong, then, to Level 3; the latter is aware of the pattern type as well, and it would fall under Level 4.

**LEVEL 4: Fixed contextual significance: significance is fixed within / across attributions (besides or other than contemporary and causal)**

This level classifies those responses which distinguish different types of significance, but make no reference to the possible conflict between accounts in the consideration of types, or to the internal variation of types. Typical examples from the Spanish Armada task-set could be:

[Wr] I think the Spanish Armada's defeat mattered. It was the beginning of lots of other things, like loss of respect for Philip II and his army. It started Spain's loss of land and colonies because the defeat showed that Spain could be beaten. It led to hope, respect and a feeling of power for the British who then continued to attack Spain, weakening it (Emma, yr 10, En 2, SA Q1).

[Wr] It was important, because Spain was losing territories from then on. And Philip [was losing] his reputation and power as a Christian. Elizabeth did not fear him so much [Int] "It changed a lot of things. Before that, Spain had more lands, more kingdoms. Afterwards, people in Spain, I think, did not support the king so much. England put more

money in ships and started to take lands away from Spain" (Angela, yr 8, Sp 3, SA Q1).

Emma makes an analysis of the significance of the Armada's defeat based on immediate consequences for England and Spain ("loss of respect for Philip II and his army"; "led to hope... for the British"), on the view of the Armada as a turning-point ("It was the beginning of lots of other things... it started Spain's loss of land"), and on the symbolic repercussions of the event ("the defeat showed that Spain could be beaten"). She gives indication of an awareness of different focuses of significance, that we call causal, pattern and symbolic. However, these notions appear within an integrating account, not with reference to two conflicting views. In the case of Angela, she weighs the importance of the defeat by means of a 'pattern significance' notion, showing the event as part of a pattern of change, and she also evaluates the contemporaries' feelings and some consequences in the short-term. Then, this response was categorized for contemporary, causal and pattern types of significance. Again, she creates an account that leaves aside a possible competition between versions.

Similarly, we find individual variations in the mention of types in Alexander's task-set.

[Wr] I think that most things that have happened in History are important in one way or another, and I think what Alexander did, does matter. He built more than 70 towns, and this in itself is important, and Story 2 states that the French emperor Napoleon tried to learn from his example. He also opened up new trade routes from the East to the West, and this matters even today (Rosie, yr 10, En 6, AG Q1).

Although Rosie stresses the intrinsic importance of Alexander's exploits ("he built more than 70 towns, and this in itself is important"), she points out other interpretations of the process: as example for later leaders, as a new trend in economic development, and in the connection between past and present ("Napoleon tried to learn from his example... he also opened up new trade routes from the East to the West, and this matters even today"). Various layers of significance in terms of which the occurrence can be studied are clearly exposed here. At the same level, a Spanish example, this time from year 8, could be this one:

[Wr] I think it was important, because Alexander the Great did not want just to conquer Persia, but he wanted to explore new lands as well, and he built more than seventy new towns. Besides, he opened new trade routes and he brought the single silver currency, which would improve trade.  
[Int] "I think it is important, he discovered new lands, he did not only conquer, but he wanted to discover new things, he opened the way for other people who tried to do what he had done, but somewhere else...the

world became bigger, people started to think..." (V́ctor, yr 8, Sp 1, AG Q1).

V́ctor starts his evaluation of Alexander's importance in intrinsic terms, very accurate in detail and focused on Alexander's intentions, but then he goes a step forward when he considers repercussions of different order. These are: causal (economic aspects; short-term consequences); pattern (Alexander's expansion as a turning point in history, economically and, above all, culturally); symbolic (other people followed his example)<sup>3</sup>.

Yet sometimes the reading of students' ideas appears more contentious. In the following case, significance is evaluated in relation to what is 'long-lasting' and 'new': Alexander's conquests are seen in their long-term consequences and in their impact on cultural aspects:

[Wr] Yes, it mattered, because in Alexander's territories a new culture spread and because great scientific advances were made (Boris, yr 8, Sp 6, AG Q1).

But is his simply a causal reasoning? Although he does not explicitly assert the notion of turning point, Boris seems to work within a 'pattern' notion, in which the idea of 'advance' and 'novelty' is highlighted over ideas of main and contributory causes. His answer was categorized as mentioning contemporary and pattern types of significance. More doubts may arise in answers where some notions of significance seem to be blurred, as the symbolic type in Lizzie's argument:

[Wr] I would say the defeat of the Armada was important. Firstly to the Spanish, as the defeat of such a huge fleet must have taken skill by the English- proving them a formidable enemy indeed. Also to the English. Also as it was a great naval success. If the Spaniards had conquered England, thus causing a new Catholic England, the whole course of history would have changed. [Int] "A knock to the Spanish confidence; a great boost for the English morale. Making the country more popular... Very costly to the Spanish... they had to rebuild their fleets" (Lizzie, yr 12, En 5, SA Q1).

The contemporary attribution is clear, as is the intrinsic importance: "a great naval success"; the defeat is also analyzed in causal terms: short- and long-term results for England and Spain, and in its connections with the future history of England. But is she interpreting the defeat as symbolic as well? A coherent and strong causal reasoning seems to pervade her approach but, on the other hand, her use of the phrase "*proving* them a formidable enemy indeed" might indicate a symbolic attribution of significance. Finally, it

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<sup>3</sup> Coding rules can be checked back in Chapter 5, p. 120.

was classified according to contemporary, causal, symbolic and present / future (“the whole course of history would have changed”) types of significance.

**LEVEL 5: Variable contextual significance: significance varies within / across attributions**

Responses falling into this level are characterized by the discrimination of various layers of significance *within* and *across* accounts, through the reference to different attributions of significance and the allusion to a conflict between accounts (in Question 1), whether the conflict is perceived as factual or criterial. The proportion of problematic cases drops unmistakably at this level, which shows a more mature thinking and higher degree of consistency across individuals (see section 7.3, in this chapter).

To illustrate the lower category within this level, in which significance is seen as variable, but is limited to contemporaries and causal attributions, the following examples have been selected:

[Wr] I think that the defeat of the Spanish Armada was important because the English had more confidence in their queen after it. It mattered because if the English had lost confidence in their monarch, there may have been a rebellion which would have threatened Britain's ability to remain a powerful country. In some ways, the defeat was less significant as it failed to bring the war between the Spanish and the English to an end. [Int] "... The Spanish and the English lost quite a lot of money..."  
(Alice, yr 10, En 4, SA Q1).

Alice makes a distinction of different degree of importance when the context changes: the defeat was important to make the English situation clear, since the Protestants won, but it did not have the same importance in solving the Spanish-English war. This answer was categorized, therefore, under the contemporary and causal types; then she would belong to Level 5.1 of our scale.

Some other doubts may arise in the categorization of this level. For instance, in Sergio's explanation:

[Wr] I think Alexander the Great did really important things. He conquered many lands and he tried to unify everything under the ideals that all races are equal, grounding his empire upon the Greek culture. Besides, as I understand from the source, he partly respected the customs of invaded peoples, and he created a currency to facilitate trade in his empire, I think he definitely did important things. [Int] "It seems as if it was more a cultural than a military conquest, not as if he was going to

oppress what he conquered, according to the sources... In one story more than in the other one" (Sergio, yr 12, Sp 4, AG Q1).

It seems clear that he establishes that significance may change within attributions, e.g. militaristic or cultural perspectives to judge Alexander's deeds. Moreover, he is aware of the conflict between stories, which is seen rather as a criterial than a merely factual issue (different perspectives, not 'the facts', lead to changes in significance). But at the same time, he appears to operate only with notions of contemporaries' and causal attributions of significance. Therefore, this answer would fall again under Level 5.1.

In the examples shown below, both students are aware of variations of significance across the two accounts (at a factual level), but add further attributions apart from contemporary and causal, thus giving us the criterion for their classification at a higher category than previous examples of this level.

[Wr] I think it did have a great importance, not because of the fact in itself<sup>4</sup>, but rather because of the feeling of frustration that this caused, apart from the immense human and economic losses that this caused. I think that with this fact, Great Britain dominated the seas at the expense of Spain. [Int] "Spain got into a crisis, she lost her naval power, since then Spain went down, little by little" (Alberto, yr 12, Sp 2, SA Q1).

Here Alberto is aware of the immediate impact of the defeat on its contemporaries ("human and economic losses"), but he explicitly denies its intrinsic importance with historical distance ("not because of the fact in itself"); in its consideration of causal and pattern types of significance, and of different degrees of importance through contexts, he relativizes the importance of the event. A similar approach is made by Stuart:

[Wr] I think that the Spanish Armada's defeat was important but not very. It helped along with other things to weaken Spain as a power. However it did not completely destroy Spain. Without other causes, Spain may still have been powerful for a long long time [sic]. People's opinions of Philip II changed. He didn't seem so powerful. Overall though, Spain recovered and is nowadays a well-developed country. [Int] "It was quite important, but not really really important. Other things led to the downfall of the Spanish Empire, not just the Armada's defeat. Afterwards, Spain remained quite powerful" (Stuart, yr 10, En 3, SA Q1).

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<sup>4</sup> 'Fact' here is probably used in the sense of 'event'. See Chapter 8, p. 250 for cross-cultural differences in students' vocabulary of historical terms

To him, significance changes according to context *across* attributions: contemporary, mid-term consequences and in a very long-term process, and also *within* attributions: the evaluation of importance for the contemporaries (Philip and the Spanish) is relative: the defeat is seen as a quite important event, but not as the main cause of a later decline; it is clearly a contributory cause. The defeat's importance is played down when it is located in a broader pattern of development. This is a very sophisticated way of reasoning for pupils of year 10, as the number of responses for this level of progression shows (13 English against 3 Spanish in year 10 out of 24 in each country). More English than Spanish pupils fall into this level in year 10 and year 12.

The next two examples respond to the task about Alexander the Great:

[Wr] I think it was important, as he began to re-unite people, people and nations gained individuality from Alexander's actions. He provided people with a hero, himself, who they looked up to and admired. This was good, because he was a very un-racist down-to earth person. However, he only made a real impact whilst living. After his death, things seemed to collapse. [Int] "People became more united... he knew how to treat people equally, and I don't know whether it was a problem at the time, but it is still a problem now, and he tried to overcome that problem... He set a big example" (Charlotte, yr 10, En 2, AG Q1).

Charlotte's slightly naive presentation must not count against what she is saying about significance here. She emphasizes Alexander's enormous impact over his contemporaries; the consequences of the unification of empire in the short term (causal); the longer lasting influence in his time and later, as a "hero... [who] set a big example" (symbolic); and the link to the present in her idea that Alexander could answer some of the problems that we still have not solved, such as racial equality. This participant presents a well-balanced view of the interpretation of Alexander's deeds in which symbolic significance is highlighted<sup>5</sup>. A Spanish example follows:

[Wr] He was important, during the time it lasted, because it changed the way of life, the currency, etc. of people who lived in the countries he conquered. [Int] "I think it was, if he conquered Persia, Asia Minor... Then, little by little, it was losing importance and, in the end, it has become what is now, separated territories such as Greece, Macedonia... they're not united. Now it is important for historians only" (Daniel, yr 10, Sp 2, AG Q1).

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<sup>5</sup> The naivety of the substantive point does not detract from the sophistication of the second-order understanding here.

Daniel recognizes that importance may change across and within different attributions, those of the contemporaries' and other long-term political consequences; apart from causal ideas, he establishes a clear contrast between the importance for 'them', for the contemporaries, opposed to the importance for 'us'. Daniel constructs the significance of a historical process in a rigid line of development up to our present. But he elaborates the notion of significance for the present and the future in his recognition of conflict between stories (negative significance for 'us'; positive for historians in their study of the past for its own sake, Daniel seems to imply), one of the features that substantiate Level 5.

As we said above, the highest degree of sophistication is reached in the combination of different types of significance and an awareness of the conflict as a criterial issue.

[Wr] It is difficult to come to a definitive decision over importance of just one person. It is clear that in his time he was a man of great importance, forming and controlling a vast empire. He expanded the knowledge of the world and introduced quite forward ideas (e.g. equality and a single currency). Though his importance may be less today, because times have changed and new heroes have emerged, he still has a part to play by inspiring others (e.g. Napoleon). [Int] "One person can be important, but you have to know the much broader aspects of it, to see if something is really important" (Thomas, yr 12, En 5, AG Q1).

This answer comprises ideas of significance in different layers: contemporaries (big empire); pattern ("he introduced quite forward ideas"); symbolic ("he still has a part to play by inspiring others..."); and what Alexander means to the present. But the definitory trait of this level of progression (and degree of sophistication within the level) is that he settles the conflicting perspectives by allusion to some kind of criteria, in this case, the need of a broader context to assess significance. A similar idea underlies the account constructed by Israel:

[Int] "It was not that important from the battle's point of view; they just missed the chance to invade England, but they didn't lose lands. From the historical point of view, it is very important indeed; since this defeat, the beginning of the Spanish decline started. If we look at what happened later, to Spain... If this is taken as a starting-point..." (Israel, yr 12, Sp 5, SA Q1).

Although the Spanish perspective is predominant here, this pupil establishes clear criteria to define importance: the point of view that one may take, either evaluating the defeat in its intrinsic terms (negative as immediate consequences for the Spanish Empire), or in its historical significance (positive as the starting-point for the Empire's decline).

The model of progression delineated in this project integrates a categorization that addresses students' ideas about importance and other related notions that have to do with significance and historical narratives, associated to diverse types of significance. These ideas develop from an unawareness of issues of importance and types of significance as connected to historical tasks, through notions of importance and significance understood only in intrinsic terms, with no reference to a wider context or variation by types, towards ideas about significance as contextual, but fixed within or across attributions, with different consideration of types and, beyond that, to the understanding of significance as contextual and variable within and across attributions. Progression is confirmed in the samples of both countries, but cross-cultural differences are detected; English students' ideas seem to develop towards higher levels of progression at earlier ages than Spanish students; more English students than Spanish ones operate within advanced sets of ideas in all year groups, particularly at younger and intermediate ages.

### **7.3. Types of significance: internal variations and common features**

Our basis for the distribution of students' responses by levels of progression was the previous characterization of data by types of significance. Specific issues and general patterns can be defined, grounded on some common ideas in students' understanding of significance. In the next sections we will discuss each type of significance, in its internal variations and common features.

#### **7.3.1. Contemporary significance**

The discussion above has considered how the study of this type of significance helps define progression. Although all students mention contemporaries' significance in a majority of responses to an open or semi-open question, younger students confine themselves to this type more frequently than the older ones. In other words, younger students tend to explain issues of significance in terms of what they think the contemporaries' views are, and in terms of immediate consequences, rather than by means of longer patterns of development. In Questions 1 and 2, particularly in Alexander's task, attitudes and intentions (categorized within the contemporary type) are frequently



mentioned in higher level responses from older students. But we found a very strong tendency in year 8 to exclusively allege *personal* features, attitudes and intentions, rather than consequences, in order to evaluate Alexander's significance (see Tables 7.1 and 7.3, and examples above). This corroborates other studies' findings about causation such as those by Carretero, Jacott and López Manjón, who concluded that younger students (years 8 and 10) "considered the personalistic cause as the most important one", and they attributed in their accounts a bigger weight to historical agents and their motives than to structural causes (Jacott et al., 1998, p. 296).

However, when multiple-choice tasks are presented, as in Questions 7 and 8 of Alexander's task set (see reference and analysis in section 7.3.4), it was a minority of students in year 8 who chose personal reasons for judging significance. Items connected with symbolic and pattern significance were preferred. This does not disconfirm our first conclusion, because both sets of questions were targeted for different aims, firstly, to know about pupils' first understandings, and secondly to check those understandings and study their flexibility. This is another case of question effect, the kind of activity makes the difference. Complementary approaches surely enhance students' thinking.

Specific features of students' ideas about contemporary significance are their different approaches to questions of empathy and moral judgements (the latter will be discussed in section 7.3.4). Internal variations range from a very clear reasoning in everyday terms to unarguable historical empathy, if we follow the denominations established by Ashby and Lee about empathy and progression (Ashby and Lee, 1987):

[Wr] I think it was important because it had to do with Royalty (Yetti, yr 8, En 2, SA Q1).

[Int] "It was important; that way they saw who was the best" (Marta, yr 8, Sp 5, SA Q1).

[Wr] The defeat of the Spanish Armada was important as they were defending the right to stay as Protestants (Mark, yr 8, En 4, SA Q1).

[Int] "People in Spain started to distrust their army, they had many debts, they had had several bankruptcies, in spite of America's gold... They were not very well off. The Armada was a considerable expense. The economy started to decline and their morale as well..." (María Jesús, yr 12, Sp 5, SA Q1).

The first two answers illustrate ways to understand the contemporaries to the event in a-historical terms, without considering what is common and what is different between us and the people in the past. Mark, however, seems to tackle the issue of contemporary significance by means of a reflection on transcendental moral, beyond everyday terms, but

possibly a-historically. María Jesús situates the defeat's impact on the contemporaries in psychological and personal terms first, to later evaluate general economic aspects in relation to 'pattern' reasoning. The latter kind of responses do assert contemporary significance, but they go beyond this type.

Different levels of knowledge of the content may play a role in students' decisions. Sophie offers a very decontextualized account of Alexander's importance:

[Int] "He could have made ways of living in Greece better without fighting" (Sophie, yr 8, En 4, AG Q1).

But in her explanation about the Armada, her judgements about the king and the queen are more specifically defined in concrete consequences, although in a very stereotyped way (good / bad):

[Int] "I don't think Philip was a very good king; he wasn't able to stop other countries from becoming independent, like Holland... but her [Elizabeth's] country stayed Protestant" (Sophie, yr 8, En 4, SA Q1).

As Tables 7.1 and 7.2. showed about distribution by types, contemporary significance is one of the most frequently mentioned in all year groups. What the tables did not show is the degree of sophistication of answers within this type. That is the reason why we have presented a range of internal variations here. Significance in history embraces the notion of historical interpretations by historians through the ages, and also a situational analysis, in Collingwood's sense: "In order to know the significance [of an event], the historian must envisage the situation with which the emperor [the agent] was trying to deal, and he must envisage it as the emperor envisaged it" (Collingwood, 1946, p. 283). In this sample, two kinds of ideas should be differentiated: a) issues of empathy that emerge in pupils' responses when they just refer to people in the past, and b) contemporary significance in a narrower sense, when they grasp what the event or the process meant for the contemporaries. The exploration of contemporary significance in students' ideas raises some questions about new possibilities in teaching approaches, which arguably should more often present multi-perspectivism (contentious and non-contentious) in the selection of sources and interpretations.

### 7.3.2. Causal significance

Causal reasoning pervades students' responses about significance, as we have seen in the examples and items that have been analyzed so far (see also Tables 7.1 to 7.6 and Graphs 7.1 to 7.5). But internal variations in causal reasoning are also present in references to story parameters such as aspect and time-scale (see Chapter 6, section 6.3.2). Several notions that emerge from students' responses allied to causal reasoning are worth comment.

**TABLE 7.8.** Number of responses categorized as causal (in English and Spanish groups by tasks, CA) and amongst them, those which mention immediate or short-term consequences only (ST(CA))

<u>Question1</u>		Yr 8			Yr 10			Yr 12		
		En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total
<b>SA</b>	<b>CA</b>	16	14	30	22	21	43	22	20	42
	<b>ST(CA)</b>	13	10	23	3	8	11	2	1	3
<b>AG</b>	<b>CA</b>	10	7	17	18	16	34	21	20	43
	<b>ST(CA)</b>	9	6	15	2	7	9	1	3	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>CA</b>	26	21	47	40	37	77	43	40	83
	<b>ST(CA)</b>	22	16	38	5	15	20	3	4	7

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**TOTAL** (24 students x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

The degree of variability in students' ideas about causation is associated with year group. Among the responses coded as causal in Table 7.1, almost all of them in the case of year 8

students mentioned immediate or short-term consequences only (see Table 7.8). In year 10 and year 12, most of the students mentioned mid- or long-term consequences as well (these kinds of answers correspond to levels 3 and 4 of 'Fixed contextual importance', respectively, in 'notion of importance' in the previous chapter). In spite of this being a small sample, it may add some information to our knowledge of causation in students' minds.

Students' approaches to the chain of causation show different understandings of the relationship between causes and consequences. Most of the responses recognize multicausalism; older students may be attentive to different focuses of causation: background conditions and proximate causes; necessary or sufficient causes; main cause and contributory causes. As we have already referred above to variations in time-scale, we comment now upon the last distinction. For some students, interpretations are made from the focus of a main cause, 'the' cause, which blurs the influence of other possible intervening causes:

[Wr] I think the Spanish Armada's defeat was important because otherwise the Spanish Empire would have grown and people and countries would lose their individuality; they would be forced to become Catholics despite their beliefs. [Int] "SA destroyed the Spanish colonies, and enabled Britain to become stronger" (Charlotte, yr 10, En 4, SA Q1).

[Wr] I think it was important, because if it hadn't happened so, the Spanish Armada would have invaded England, and it could have invaded other territories (Rafael, yr 12, Sp 2, SA Q1).

The Armada's defeat is seen here as having a tremendous causal force, a catalyst for the later decline in Spain and the growth of other countries. The use of counter-factuals is frequent in this type of response<sup>6</sup>. For other students, the event had a domino or snowball effect:

[Wr] The Armada's defeat wasn't big at the beginning, but it did get bigger, carried on expanding problems because of it (Fraser, yr 8, En 6, SA Q8).

[Wr] I think it was important, because if a big empire, as the Spanish was by then, is defeated that way, its self-esteem goes down and without it, defeats will come one after the other until the point in which the empire disappears (Rebeca, yr 10, Sp 6, SA Q1).

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<sup>6</sup> Another example that illustrates this kind of idea is Lizzie's (En 5, yr 10): "If the Spaniards had conquered England, thus causing a new Catholic England, the whole course of history would have changed", examined above.

Monocausal and multicausal ideas can also be traced in questions 7 and 8 from the Alexander task set. In these questions (see Appendix VI and Table 7.9), students were asked to decide between different reasons to explain why Alexander's campaigns were important and whether there was one best sentence to explain why what Alexander did was important.

**TABLE 7.9. AG Question 8:** Choice of "one best sentence"

<b><u>AG Question 8</u></b>	<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>YES</b>	19	18	37	13	21	34	9	15	24
<b>NO</b>	5	6	11	11	3	14	15	9	24

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**Yes:** number of students who picked up one sentence (from the given choices) as "best"

**No:** number of students who decided that there was no "one best sentence"

The majority of students from year 8 and year 10, and half of the students from year 12 opted for the selection of a main cause to explain the significance of Alexander's campaigns. In year 10 and year 12, the English students opted for multi-reasoned responses in a bigger proportion than the Spanish ones. Examples of 'monocausal' selection might be:

[Wr] I think the best one is when he got injured many times in battle (e) because that means he is not watching them fight his soldiers, and he's fighting with them. (Clare, yr 8, En 1, AG Q8).

[Wr] I think (d) is the most important, because that was what he really did. He built an empire to spread the Greek culture, the most important one in those times (Angela, yr 10, Sp 1, AG Q8).

'Multiple reasons for importance' conceptions are sometimes expressed in terms of clear weighting in connection with issues of importance (as we saw in Chapter 6, section 6.2):

[Wr] I think there are different facts, and different sentences, that globally depict Alexander's campaigns as important. I suppose that some will be more important or transcendent than others, but all together make the campaigns important in themselves (Elena, yr 12, Sp 1, AG Q8).

[Wr] There is not one best sentence, as all the sentences deal with different reasons for his success, and the best answer would therefore be an amalgamation of all the sentences, plus any other relevant, important, things. All the sentences are important, but are best when considered together. [Int] "You need to take into account all of them. Every statement would be as important... the odd one which strikes me most is (h), that is why he was so ahead of his time... If you want to focus in, then you can start putting numbers, but then it would blind the others" (Harry, yr 12, En 6, AG Q8).

Elena weights the hierarchy of causes globally ("all together make the campaigns important..."), whereas Harry appears to evaluate, more than the simple causal addition, the relationships between causes ("All the sentences are important, but are best when considered together"). Higher levels of structural conceptual understanding still show those students that go beyond the specific content and feel the author under the text, that is, a recognition of the active role of historians:

[Wr] Different people have different opinions on what is important. Also, it depends on what is important as a subject to the historian, e.g. if you are looking at the racial equality of the issue, what Alexander did was important, as with all the other subjects of the sentences (Elizabeth, yr 12, En 4, AG Q8).

Therefore, we must consider the importance of an event or process in relation to other factors in bringing about the changes identified. The extent to which the historian traces the origins of a particular change depends on his/her point of view and the strand under consideration.

One striking feature of some students' ideas about causal significance is the notion of 'endless transmission' (Shemilt, 1980), and its relation to issues of transcendental significance, in the Armada task-set. This feature is present in both countries, more often in England. The causal force of the defeat is seen as carrying undiminished across the centuries, joining past and present:

[Wr] I think it is important, because when we lost the countries we had, we had less money and little importance. They spent a lot of money, but the only thing that can comfort us is that we were the strongest fleet of

all. If we had now the countries we had before, Spanish would be spoken more than English and Chinese, and we would be better known (Jorge, yr 8, Sp 2).

[Wr] I think that the Armada's defeat was important because Europe now would probably still be under the Spanish Empire and most countries would not be independent like Holland. (Rory, yr 8, En 1, SA Q1).

[Wr] I think the defeat of the Spanish Armada was important because if Spain had beat[en] England, then today the British may still be under the rule of the Spanish and England would not be a free country and may not be as financially stable (Noreen, yr 12, En 3, SA Q1).

[Int] "Maybe, in this moment, England would belong to Spain" (Angel Luis, yr 12, Sp 3, SA Q3).

An alternative conception --the faded influence of an event in the long term-- may be seen at the same level as a short-term consequence; counterfactuals are unnaturally stretched ahead. The events considered are somehow "frozen" moments in history, which can lead to the present state of affairs without any intermediate attempt for weighting other causes or consequences (see Barton, 1996).

On the other hand, Alberto's and Nanette's responses are examples of representation of well-articulated causal chains. A direct cause-effect notion is substituted by a more elaborated net of significance links: contemporary, causal, pattern, symbolic and connection with the present or the future, and the weighting of causes:

[Wr] ... Due to this event<sup>7</sup>, history has been determined, if the Armada had not failed, history would have been different... Perhaps now it does not appear to be that important, but to the people of those days it must have been a very important event [*hecho*]. [Int] "If England had been invaded, then now it wouldn't be what it is... But since Spain was defeated, England founded colonies in North America and it is now what it is..." (Alberto, yr 12, Sp 4, SA Q1).

[Wr] It would appear, on the surface, that the Spanish Armada's defeat was not of great significance to the stability of the Empire and Spain's power. The defeat did not prevent Philip II from being the most powerful king in the Western world and in 1700, Spain still controlled more land in Western Europe than any other country and had the biggest Empire in America and the Pacific. However, it did harm the power and confidence

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<sup>7</sup> The words 'suceso' (=event) and 'hecho' (=fact) are indistinctly employed here, it seems, in the sense of 'event'.

of the Spanish. [Int] "We have lost our reputation as invincible warriors". It was of great importance because it was the start of their decline - economically and more importantly, in terms of the Empire. It lost most of its European Empire in 1713 and most of its American colonies in 1830 (Nanette, yr 12, En 1).

Another question in the Armada task-set, Question 8 (*Some things that happen seem to make a big difference to what happens next, but it is not always easy to decide. What difference did the defeat of the Armada make?*; see Appendix V) was intended to study types of significance through students' choices along a time-line. Students were asked to pick up sentences which had some relation with the defeat. Terms such as 'direct / indirect' consequences were deployed to explain their choices:

[Wr] Spain lost control of America... not directly because of the Armada, but they lost money because of it (Tom, yr 10, En 6, SA Q8)

The first five items, considered as immediate and short-term after-effects were selected by the majority of students in all grades (Appendix V, Question 8). They were seen as "directly after the defeat" or "direct consequences". Some English students, though, questioned the ambiguity of what was being asked: "Shall I consider only the short-term consequences or also the effects in the long run? (Jon, yr 10, En 2, SA Q 8 or Chris, yr 12, same school). No Spanish student made this kind of observation, probably because they have not been usually taught the language of structural concepts in their history lessons. As noticed in other places in this project, frequently variations in ways of reasoning across cultures (England / Spain) appear to be small; what usually establishes the difference is the vocabulary English students are able to use; nevertheless, if we accept that language and thought operate together, it is legitimate to infer that English students are likely to reach higher stages of understanding, as indeed seems to be the case in this sample (see the chart of levels of progression on p. 194).

### 7.3.3. Pattern significance

Pattern notions of significance have been studied in relation to emplotment and story parameters (Chapter 6, section 6.3). We said that patterns of development are established by attaching significance to changes and linking them together in a developmental account. It seems to be a marker of highly elaborated ways of understanding, as the distribution of responses by types and by grade corroborates (see Tables and Graphs 7.1 and 7.2). Pattern ideas tend to be rather clear in year 10 and year 12, but we have encountered several



doubtful cases in year 8. Some examples have been glossed in above sections. Degree of sophistication ranges from problematic cases (Cristina), through simple and clear-cut ideas (David), to more elaborated arguments (Liz):

[Wr] (...) He had conquered part of Asia, opened up the way to other cultures. [Int] "Yes, it was a step to explore new lands, to conquest, to know about their cultures, to learn how other people live..." (Cristina, yr 8, Sp 1, AG Q1).

[Wr] Yes, it was important, because it was the beginning of the Spanish decline (David, yr 10, Sp 3, SA Q1).

[Wr] I think it was important and that it did matter. What Alexander achieved was an amazing feat over such a large area. It has changed the cultures of the countries involved, and he is obviously a key figure in Northern Greece, and in history. The idea of such a large empire at that time is amazing, before that of Rome, and also of such military success (Liz, yr 12, En 6, AG Q1).

Cristina locates Alexander's importance first in intrinsic terms: consequences are contained in the issues of conquest and exploration; but her words "open up the way... it was a step to explore new lands..." seem to imply an idea of turning-point for the subsequent events of Alexander's campaigns. David focuses on a single perspective, that of Spain, considering the defeat as the turning point for a long process of change. Liz recognizes the intrinsic significance of the campaigns ("an amazing feat") and their consequences ("changed the cultures..."); moreover, she analyzes Alexander's historical significance in her comparison to later empires like Rome ("the idea of such a large empire at that time is amazing"); the notion underlying here is that of Alexander being ahead of his time, which clearly indicates a pattern conception of significance.

The influence of content and, probably, of pupils' teaching experience should be noted here. From isolated data obtained in Question 1 and accumulated data in Questions 1 and 2, the pattern notion is more frequently mentioned by year 12 Spanish students than by their English counterpart in the Spanish Armada task-set. This could be related to the fact that older students, and particularly the Spanish ones, are more familiar with the conceptual framework of the Spanish decline as a process rooted in Philip II's reign. On the other hand, the parallel framework (also suggested in the stories) of the building of the British Empire begun in Elizabethan times, is more frequently disregarded, or even explicitly rejected, by English students. For example:

"[Int] ...You can't really see that SA had so long-term effects... just lingering in the memory, perhaps... But the connection of SA with

the growth of the British Empire... it is definitely far-fetched"  
(Harry, yr 12, En 6, SA Q1).

If we turn back to Question 2 (*Does the Spanish Armada's defeat / what Alexander did matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?*), the number of responses which justified a conflict between the two stories by allusion to pattern notions of significance is very low (see Table 7.10), particularly in comparison to the allusions made to this type in Question 1 (See Tables and Graphs 7.1 and 7.2, pp. 184-187). Variations across content can be discovered: the number of responses is still lower in the Alexander than in the Armada task-set. Disparity across countries must also be noticed: English students scored over Spanish ones in all year groups in allusions to pattern notions. Moreover, the less frequent tendency to evaluate significance in pattern terms in Alexander's than in the Armada's content is common to both countries, and there are no cases of pattern types of thinking in the Alexander's set among Spanish students in Question 2.

Some examples will help to explore this issue qualitatively. In year 8, no student from the Alexander set showed 'pattern' reasoning. With regard to the Armada set, only two students in English schools and one in Spanish ones coded for it. Among them, these examples have been selected:

[Wr] The Spanish Armada defeat in both stories does not matter the same. In story one it tells us that Philip's defeat did not change the fact that he was the most powerful king in the Western world. In story two it said the defeat was the beginning of its decline (Jonathan, yr 8, En 2, SA Q2).

[Int] "In story 1 they say it didn't matter so much, because Philip continued to be a powerful king; in story 2, it started to decline and having more debts, and the Dutch rebellion was stronger" (Daniel, yr 8, Sp 5, SA Q2).

Both pupils approach the different evaluation of the defeat's significance in the two stories in a similar way, stressing the idea of continuity over change in the first story and the notion of the defeat as marker for the Spanish decadence in story 2 (apart from other reasons expressed in causal terms, in Daniel's case).

**TABLE 7.10.** Number of responses which explain the possible conflict between stories by allusion to pattern notions of significance

<b>Question 2</b>		<b>Yr 8</b>			<b>Yr 10</b>			<b>Yr 12</b>		
		<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>Sp</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>PA</b>	<b>SA</b>	2	1	3	8	2	10	13	10	23
	<b>AG</b>	0	0	0	3	0	3	3	0	3
	<b>TOTAL</b>	2	1	<b>3</b>	11	2	<b>13</b>	16	10	<b>26</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**PA** = pattern

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**TOTAL** (24 students x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

In year 10, as in the rest of the groups as a whole, more English pupils than Spanish ones follow a pattern line of reasoning in this question. Some responses are led by the same kind of main idea that we saw in year 8:

[Wr] It doesn't matter the same. In the first story they say that he went on trying hard [=sending more armadas], but in the second one they say that this was the beginning of the Spanish decline and it brought on problems of money, etc. (Marta, yr 10, Sp 1, SA Q2).

[Wr] No. In Story 1 I think it portrays an image of Philip II adamant that the strength of his empire has not altered. However, Story 2 highlights the Armada's defeat as 'the beginning of the Empire's decline' (Laura, yr 10, En 5, SA Q2).

In other cases, the notion of pattern significance is clearly elaborated, as in Alice's explanation of the connection of the Armada's defeat with the Spanish decline and the building of the British Empire:

[Int] "Story 1 is quite pro-English, what happened to England after the battle; Story 2 is not just about the defeat; it talks about England

attacking, making the English look good and the Spanish bad... It's more important in Story 1 than in Story 2, the war went on and nothing really changed... Maybe, Story 1 [would explain] how the English built themselves, and Story 2, the start of the Spanish decline" (Alice, yr 10, En 4, SA Q2).

Among students from year 12, causal and pattern notions are usually more precisely defined. For Sonia, the defeat's importance is played down in one story and is seen as a turning point in the other. Chris highlights the role of the defeat as contributory cause in the first account and as a turning point, again, in the second one.

[Wr] It doesn't matter the same, because (...) story 1 considers it as something that did not change history too much, but, on the other hand, in story 2 they see it as the beginning of a failure (Sonia, yr 12, Sp 3, SA Q2).

[Wr] No. Story 2 takes the position that the Spanish Armada's defeat mattered greatly as it was "decisive setback" that was the "beginning of the Spanish decline". Contrastingly, Story 1 is of the opinion that the Armada's defeat was of no greater importance than any of the other events such as the uprisings and the new technology that placed England in a better position to attack and trade. (Chris, yr 12, En 2, SA Q2).

In the task-set about Alexander, pattern notions in one story are contrasted with contemporary in the other, in an opposition between the idea of failure and the idea of success:

[Wr] I don't think it matters the same in both stories. Story 2 tells us how Alexander's ideas opened up a whole new world and way of living, which carried on after his death, while story 1 tells us that his ideas were not that good as they quickly fell into ruins after his death (Amy, yr 10, En 5, SA Q2).

Fareed weighs the competing interpretations of the accounts confronting notions of causation in both stories, and ascribes pattern and symbolic attributions to Alexander's significance in the second story:

[Wr] I would say that it is more important in Story 2, because it talks about the economic implications (...) It also speaks of the long-term consequences, for example, it broadened people's perspective, 'but after him, the world opened out; it seemed... a much bigger place'. Whereas in Story 1 the empire fell in ruins, in Story 2 it speaks about the 'long-lasting achievements'. And it shows a list of great leaders who read about him

and admired him, which puts him in a very good light in terms of his prowess as a leader (Fareed, yr 12, En 1, SA Q2).

In Question 8 of the Armada task-set (*Some things that happen seem to make a big difference to what happens next, but it is not always easy to decide. What difference did the defeat of the Armada make?*), one of the sentences attempted to refer to pattern kinds of reasoning (item 12: *Spain lost its European Empire*)<sup>8</sup>. The number of students who ticked the box next to item 12 is shown in Table 7.11.

**TABLE 7.11.** Number of students who picked up item 12 in SA Question 8

<u>SA Question 8</u>	Yr 8			Yr 10			Yr 12		
	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total
<b>ITEM 12</b>	21	14	35	19	20	39	14	17	31

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

A large number of students in all grades and in both countries selected this item. If we compare these numbers with those in Tables 7.1 and 7.2, it could be argued that students do recognize pattern significance, but they do not spontaneously employ it. However, choice alone does not necessarily mean the recognition of the pattern type. Among students' justifications of their choices, some examples have been selected to offer a range of the most usual cases in all three year groups and in both countries.

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<sup>8</sup> This could be an example of a task that, though not working in the simple way intended, nevertheless it produced interesting data.

## **Year 8**

### **English students**

1. "Spain was weakening and they didn't have the confidence they had before the Armada"
2. "They were losing battles and other countries were gaining independence"
3. "Other countries... everybody thought they could also beat them"

### **Spanish students**

1. "They lost the confidence in the king"
2. "All the countries thought they could be independent"

## **Year 10**

### **English students**

1. "It's a very big outcome"
2. "It happened for a number of reasons: a small part of it was the defeat"
3. "Not directly linked, but the Armada was one of the causes"
4. "It started to decline since the defeat. That's what I understood from reading the stories. It happened gradually, but it did really since the Armada"

### **Spanish students**

1. "No, I don't think that only for a battle all the empire can be lost"
2. "It has something to do, but there are more causes"
3. "Following the defeat, other countries rebelled"
4. "It is the beginning of the loss of the Spanish Empire"

## **Year 12**

### **English students**

1. "It's not strongly linked, but the defeat was an indirect factor, as in 14: they (the Spanish Empire) were more open to foreign attacks; foreigners gained confidence... But I'm not so sure, because the problem is considering the defeat as the cause"

2. "The defeat triggered the Spanish Empire's decline"
3. "From 12, it's a new causation, really"
4. "It's a long term consequence; the effect is massive. I don't know how much the defeat affected it; it's a most decisive consequence"

### **Spanish students**

1. "The defeat is one of the causes, but not a direct cause"
2. "There were more causes, but the defeat was one of them"
3. "The defeat was the beginning".

Most of the students whose responses are shown above speak in causal rather than in pattern terms, when they try to make sense of the relationship between the Armada's defeat and the loss of the Spanish-European empire. For them, the question seems to be how to delimit the defeat's causal force, as an English student from year 12 very graphically indicates: "From item 12, it's a new causation, really" (Hannah, yr 12, En 2, SA Q8). Students from year 8, in both countries, appear to infer from the stories an umbrella theme which could group both sentences together, the theme of the process of independence for different countries (sometimes seen as an event rather than as a process). Among students from year 8, psychological immediate effects are also frequently reported, expanding something that rather should be considered as immediate to a wide span of time<sup>9</sup>. Symbolic notions are also present in year 8 and year 10 pupils, as we will explain below (Section 7.3.4); the defeat showed other countries within the Spanish Empire that its rule could be opposed. Year 10 students introduce higher levels of ideas, viewing the defeat only as contributory cause and, in cases (especially Spanish ones), as having no causal connection at all with the empire's loss. Year 10 and year 12 pupils quite often use the terms of 'direct' and 'indirect' results to situate the events, whereas none of the year 8 students employ this terminology. A minority of students follow their former recognition of pattern notions in the relationship between two extremes of the process of decline, justifying their choice in strictly pattern terms (in the above list, examples number 4 in year 10 both in England and in Spain: "It is the beginning of the loss of the Spanish Empire"; example 3 in year 12, in Spain). Most of students, though, even if they mentioned a pattern approach in their answers to other questions, do not explain their choice in this question in pattern terms.

Therefore, the analysis that may be made here does not fully correspond to the initial target of question 8, that associated particular items to distinct notions of significance (pattern in

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<sup>9</sup> In connection with these ideas, see the discussion about 'personification' and 'eventification' in Chapter 6, p.154.

this case); nevertheless, it helps delineate further students' ideas about this type of significance. To make sense of the question formulated, students seem to practice a 'strategy of conversion' (Ashby and Lee, 1998; Barca-Oliveira, 1996), from pattern to causal notions of significance. Most of these students talk about possible connections in terms of 'causes' only; this rigid causal language can blind them to other kinds of relationships within significance, such as pattern or symbolic. Lack of specific vocabulary might be hindering richer possibilities of thinking. To explain the different attributions of significance to which an event may respond we do not need to limit our thinking to causal links.

#### **7.3.4. Symbolic significance**

The remaining of an event, change or any other occurrence in the historical consciousness may sometimes go much further beyond the real effects of that event; in this sense, we talk about the event's 'symbolic' significance. A distinct treatment of this type of attribution was expected across task-sets. In the Spanish Armada, symbolic notions are entangled with questions of partisanship, nationalistic issues and national perspectives (see Chapter 6, section 6.4). English and Spanish students were expected to be more sensitive to questions of content here than in Alexander's campaigns, which was intended as a 'neutral' theme. In Alexander's task, conceptions of his significance as symbolic rather depend on the setting of an example for posterity, in more general terms.

In Table 7.1 we highlighted a particular feature about the distribution of responses belonging to each type of significance. Many more students in England than in Spain answered Question 1 in symbolic terms, in all year groups and particularly in year 12. Interestingly, this happened across both sets of tasks. No Spanish student from year 8 mentioned this attribution for the Spanish Armada's significance. Nevertheless, a typical 'symbolic' explanation for the defeat's importance seems to be more common to English students in all grades. One possible reason for the different distribution of symbolic notions in students' responses in England and Spain is their different teaching experiences. Traditionally, school history in England has transmitted the view of the Armada's defeat as a symbol for English history; if not as one of the primeval moments of the building of the British Empire (as Victorian historians liked to represent it), it is generally viewed as a sign of the weakening of Spain: the Armada's sad failure showed the rest of European countries, within and outside the Empire, that the Spanish rulers could be beaten. However, in Spain the event of the defeat is usually studied --if at all-- as one more battle in Philip's



reign, within the broader context of the Habsburgs' European policy. However, the striking finding is that, among English students, the scores in awareness of symbolic notions are even higher in the Alexander task-set. And this could be seen as contradictory with the teaching traditions in both countries. At secondary school level, in Spain there is usually a greater emphasis on Classical times (Greece and Rome) than there is in England. It is possible then that, irrespective of content, English pupils are more prone than Spanish ones to interpret historical processes in a symbolic sense, because of their greater experience in explicitly learning about structural concepts in history. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss common and contrasting perspectives of English and Spanish students about symbolic interpretations of the Armada's defeat.

The 'traditional' or more usual symbolic notion in English students is embodied by these three responses, from different year groups:

[Wr] I think that the defeat of the Spanish Armada was important because it showed to other countries under Spanish rule (that were rebelling, such as Holland) that the Spanish could be defeated, so that gave them inspiration. [Int] "Other countries could see that they could also defeat the Spanish" (Philip, yr 8, En 2, SA Q1).

[Wr] I think the Spanish Armada's defeat mattered. It was the beginning of lots of other things, like loss of respect for Philip II and his army. It started Spain's loss of land and colonies because the defeat showed that Spain could be beaten. It led to hope, respect and a feeling of power for the British who then continued to attack Spain, weakening it (Emma, yr 10, En 2, SA Q1).

[Wr] (...) The Protestants in Spain now would have more courage to fight against Philip as they thought that God was with them. [Int] "There was an effect on the king, obviously --people was trusting him before... Give other countries an opportunity to break away... They could think: this is a weak country... They were quite religious at that time" (Kamaljit, yr 12, En 3, SA Q1).

In fact, all these students operate from the perspective of the people of the past; they try to reflect the contemporaries' perceptions, and all of them agree that the defeat *showed* the Spanish weakness when facing its duties to keep the Empire's reputation high; loss of respect and low moral (Spain) are opposed to self-confidence and inspiration (England). The situational analysis is made explicit in Kamaljit's answer, in his direct allusion to people "at that time". But Emma goes beyond contemporary significance in her emplotment of the defeat in the patterns of Spanish decline and English rise.

Among Spanish pupils, only one was found who fell under the 'symbolic type' category and who held this particular idea of the defeat's significance in contemporaries' terms, although some positive note for Spain is added:

[Wr] I think it was important, because the victory over an Armada which was called 'Invincible' made that Spain got a bit to pieces, and it gave a lot of confidence to the English; Spain's reputation changed, although they continued to have the best army. [Int] "Spain believed she was invincible, but she was defeated and the rest of countries did not respect her any more" (Javier, yr 10, Sp 2, SA Q1).

A second view of the defeat as symbolic derives from it a generalization about the religious wars that devastated a great part of Europe in the 16th century. This view is present in students from both countries:

[Wr] (...) It was a war in which lots of things were at risk... [Int] "It wasn't just a war between Spain and England, but between Catholics and Protestants" (Beatriz, yr 10, Sp 5, SA Q1).

[Wr] (...) It could also have been seen as a triumph of Protestantism over Philip's Catholicism (...) (Liz, yr 12, En 6, SA Q1).

[Wr] Two ways of government and two different beliefs were confronted (Arancha, yr 12, Sp 3, SA Q1).

A step forward in students' symbolic understandings takes place when they report not only contemporaries' perceptions of the event of the past in a particular version of history, but the perspectives of subsequent presents and, moreover, judgements about how historians may have dealt with the issue of the Armada's symbolic significance. This third approach, that is, the awareness of perspectives at different time-scales may be represented by the following students' accounts:

[Wr] The Spanish Armada's defeat was important. It was important because it was the division Philip II did not want in his Empire. The division of religions made Elizabeth more popular than Philip, because there was a feeling of manifest destiny on England's part, which also made the Protestants a stronger group, who were in unison to rebel against Philip's Catholics (Sarah, yr 10, En 4, SA Q1).

[Wr] I think that the Spanish Armada's defeat was very important to the English (...) it was a source of national pride and confidence in their devotion to Protestantism. It was important because it meant that a country like England could beat a powerful nation like the Empire, and their credibility was lost (...) (Jenny, yr 12, En 6, SA Q1).

Sarah and Jenny seem to allude here to a 'whig interpretation of history' in their view that Protestantism, not Catholicism, was the "manifest destiny" for the English, one of their distinctive features for national identity. This view only takes shape with distance, and it was shared by many English historians in the 19th century. Spanish students, quite expectedly, tend to disregard these long-term connections in English history and focus their interpretation of the defeat's symbolic significance on its possible connections with the Spanish Empire's later decline:

[Wr] (...) I would say that the battle had importance in that very moment, but both countries could go on, it was not something that marked history for ever. [Int] "It had consequences, but I don't think it was so important... There were economic crises and loss of confidence, but it was not that much. We had bad luck... but Philip went on being powerful; the decline has many more motives and will come much later" (Angeles, yr 12, Sp 5, SA Q1).

Angeles explicitly denies the symbolic meaning of the defeat; it is rather considered as a minor contributory cause of a conjunctural crisis in Philip's reign; the Spanish decline which "will come much later" does not have any direct relation with the Armada's defeat. It is also worth noticing Angeles' use of the word 'motives' (translation of *motivos* in Spanish) in the sense of 'causal antecedents', applied to a pattern of development. A problem of language arises here; if we took Angeles' wording literally, we could point out that she is identifying 'reasons for action' and 'causal antecedents' (Lee et al., 1997); more data would be needed to be more certain about this correspondence, but this shows one of the difficulties this kind of research has to cope with: an arbitrary use of the terminology on second-order concepts in history, particularly apparent among Spanish students.

A fourth approach reaches a more refined elaboration of the theme of the Armada's symbolic significance. Responses like the following locate the limits of contemporary significance in contrast to historians' accounts:

[Wr] I think the Spanish Armada was important in the way that the Spanish reputation was daunted, proving that they weren't invincible (...) [Int] "We've been learning that it wasn't really an English victory, but a Spanish mistake... I think in the long term it was more important for the English... Spain lost psychological power over people, England got a reputation of being quite strong... It was like the beginning of the decline of the Spanish Empire... it wasn't like a BIG thing, in practical terms...but other countries of the Empire thought if the English have won..." (Fraser, yr 8, En 6, SA Q1).

[Wr] Yes, it was important, because following this event the Spanish decline would start and its economy would weaken little by little. Above all, it had a symbolic importance. [Int] "It's the beginning of the decline of the Spanish Empire. It is symbolic, rather than anything else. It was not such a traumatic event; it was a bit of a starting-point (Guillem, yr 12, Sp 1, SA Q1).

For Spain, the defeat is seen as a conventional date to explain a pattern of decline, it was not really important for Spain "in practical terms", that is to say, not from a causal, but from a pattern point of view, from historians' perspective. For England, it is symbolic to the extent that it set an example for Spain's adversaries, as we saw above in the first approach. What is definitory here is, firstly, the students' capability to stand apart from the event to make possible an analysis of history writing, not only of history as the past. But secondly, it is also very noticeable the difference of approach between both sets of students, English and Spanish; both had access in the research material to indications of symbolic importance. Teaching may well have affected them in terms of sensitization and, more important, in terms of concepts, but the materials gave clear indications of this kind of significance, and the English students adopted this kind of approach, while the Spanish students tended to ignore it.

One particular sentence from Question 8 in the Spanish Armada (item 14: "*The Spanish navy is defeated by the English at Trafalgar*") was intended to probe the treatment of the symbolic significance of the Armada's defeat. The number of students who ticked the box next to item 14 is shown in Table 7.12.

**TABLE 7.12.** Number of students who picked up item 14 in SA Question 8

<u>SA Question 8</u>	Yr 8			Yr 10			Yr 12		
	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total
ITEM 14	13	18	31	12	10	22	12	13	25

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

As in the previous examples of this question that we analyzed in relation to pattern significance, it can be held that this approach to symbolic significance may be flawed, because the choice alone does not guarantee a symbolic reading in the student's interpretation of the sentence. However, students' explanations of their choice may throw light on this matter, and confirm or disconfirm our first hypothesis, that is, the link of item 14 with symbolic significance. Some of these explanations are shown below:

## **Year 8**

### **English students**

1. "It's another defeat"
2. "They saw they had won once; they could do it again"
3. "The Spanish could have been a bit demoralized, when they had to face the English again, because they had suffered that defeat"
4. "They learnt something from the past; they knew how to defeat Spain"

### **Spanish students**

1. "It's another defeat"
2. "It's a war between Spain and England"
3. "They remembered it; there are things that remain stuck in one's mind"
4. "They lacked that 'mythology' about the Invincible Armada"

## **Year 10**

### **English students**

1. "Another defeat for the Spanish by the English"
2. "They just go downhill..."
3. "The Spanish had been defeated in the Armada; they wanted to get their reputation back"
4. "The defeat was the trigger that led to this; all stems back to [item] 4 (= "*Elizabeth decided to invest more in fleets*")

### **Spanish students**

1. "I thought it was part of the war between Spain and England"
2. "It has to do, because it is also a very remarkable defeat"

3. "It is a sort of vengeance"
4. "Because the English invested in new fleets"

## **Year 12**

### **English students**

1. "They could have remembered their old victories, surviving through the times..."
2. "The English remembering the defeat; they could do it again; there could be an influence on the mentality of the people coming into war"
3. "A reminiscence of what happened; we have clinged on memories, we are always referring back to things in the past, like King Arthur... we referred back to Trafalgar in WW2"

### **Spanish students**

1. "Although it is far away, since that defeat, Spain was going down and England going up. Each time they were confronted, England would win"
2. "Since the defeat, England was a maritime power; that's why they won at Trafalgar"

Different kinds of thinking are operating here. A symbolic approach is not guaranteed by the choice alone in this sub-task; nevertheless, several trends are worth noticing. Examples numbered as '1' in year 8 and year 10 in both countries do not judge the connection between the Armada's defeat and Trafalgar beyond their intrinsic value: another defeat in the process of conflicts between Spain and England. Other responses perceive Trafalgar as a reaction on the part of Spain (examples '3' in year 10 in England and Spain). Several younger students from year 8 evaluate the connection at a psychological level, in consonance with the symbolic interpretation we defined above as 'first approach' (see p. 222 on pattern significance above). Students from year 10 offer different types of causal reasoning (examples '4' in year 10, both countries). In year 12, English participants justify their choice in clear symbolic terms, unlike the Spanish, who tend rather to give pattern connections between the defeats of 1588 and 1805. Thus parallel approaches to those discussed for Question 1 appear in Question 8 as well.

The issue of *moral judgements* in history, related to the 'symbolic' attribution of significance arises spontaneously in this data sample. No systematic study of the matter

has been done yet in this work, but a preliminary analysis may add some interesting insights to the investigation of pupils' ideas about symbolic significance. Data from question 1 was chosen to substantiate a first approach. Allusion to moral judgements varies quite perceptively across age, as Table 7.13 shows.

**TABLE 7.13.** Number of responses in Question 1 that allude to issues of moral judgements.

<u>Question 1</u>		Yr 8			Yr 10			Yr 12		
		En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total
<b>MJ</b>	<b>SA</b>	8	4	10	5	2	7	1	1	2
	<b>AG</b>	11	2	13	6	4	10	4	0	4
	<b>TOTAL</b>	19	6	<b>23</b>	11	6	<b>17</b>	5	1	<b>6</b>

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**MJ** = moral judgement

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**SA** (Spanish Armada task-set)

**AG** (Alexander the Great task-set)

**TOTAL** (24 students x 2 countries x 2 tasks = 96 / year)

Frequency of mention of these kind of judgements decreases with age, very clearly among English students. There is a contrast across countries, too. English students tend to mention moral issues more often than Spanish ones. Younger students seem to be more prone to offer this kind of judgements as a justification of their responses. A certain degree of progression can be seen through the patterns that emerge from pupils' responses. At the lowest levels, some students make use of their own moral understanding to justify their responses, but only in everyday terms or as transcendental moral judgements, with no reference to any particular historical context.

[Wr] (...) I don't think the Armada's defeat was really important (...) I don't really see the point in fighting" (Ceris, yr 8, En 5, SA Q1).

[Wr] The defeat of the Spanish Armada was important as they were defending the right to stay as Protestants (Mark, yr 8, En 4, SA Q1).

Other answers can relate different historical contexts, but arriving at a-historical generalizations, as Charlotte shows in her evaluation of 'equality of rights'.

[Int] "People became more united... he knew how to treat people equally, and I don't know whether it was a problem at the time, but it is still a problem now, and he tried to overcome that problem... He set a big example" (Charlotte, yr 10, En 2, AG Q1).

Even at higher levels of elaboration, students of this sample tend to operate in everyday terms in the issue of moral judgements; they are able to search for a balance between the two stories, but they do not achieve a situated approach to moral reasoning (framing the contemporaries' values within a perspective different from ours); it is rather 'our' morality what is being discussed:

In some ways, what Alexander achieved was very important, attempting to base his empire on racial equality, and in inspiring loyalty by sharing the danger of his troops. In this way, he posed an example that subsequent leaders could look to. In other ways, it did not matter. It could be said that what he did achieved little other than bloodshed in the various wars, and taught later leaders that land was all-important (Alice, yr 10, En 6).

In general with regard to the symbolic attribution of significance, we have seen that the Spanish students tend to operate less with this idea than the English ones in the second task-set about Alexander the Great, as also occurred in the first task-set (see Table 7.1). Content does not seem to be a significant variable for Spanish students in this issue. However, English responses that indicate an awareness of symbolic understandings are more numerous in the Alexander set, especially among older students. Ideas about symbolic significance underlying students' answers are more homogeneous across grades and countries than in the Armada's case. The main symbolic notion among students represents Alexander's deeds as an example for posterity, for other leaders, in particular, and for empire building in general. The link with Rome and other empires is more easily established by older students, with higher levels of knowledge, whereas younger students tend to make their judgements focused on individuals. These ideas are emphasized in all the following excerpts (emphasis added):

[Int] "He wanted to discover new things, he opened the way *for other people who tried to do what he did (...)*, the world opened up, people started to think..." (V́ctor, yr 8, Sp 1, AG Q1).



[Wr] I think it did matter, because it said that *other great leaders, such as Napoleon, learned from his work and tried to do things the way he did* (...) (Rory, yr 8, En 1, AG Q1).

[Wr] I think it was very important. Not only was it what he conquered, but also he *set an example for the ones who follow him*, as the text says, even Napoleon or Caesar paid tribute to him (María, yr 12, Sp 1, AG Q1).

[Wr] (...) Alexander's empire *set an example for later empires*, closer to us. [Int] (...) "If some other people, centuries later, such as Napoleon, if people remember him as something important... it must be so" (María Jesús, yr 12, Sp 5, AG Q1).

[Wr] I believe Alexander (...) was also important as *an inspiration to monarchs* such as Henry VIII, the Caesars and even the French emperor Napoleon (...) the scale of Alexander's success must live on the minds of both the conquered and the proud Macedonians and Greeks. Above all, his conquests were an *example to the Romans*; one of the greatest conquerors of all time (Harry, yr 12, En 6, AG Q1).

In the final example, Leah makes a fine distinction between intentions, achievements and something else, what we call here 'symbolic significance'; she summarizes very neatly the features of a 'symbolic' interpretation of Alexander's campaigns, at both intrinsic and historical levels:

[Wr] It can be argued that it did matter what Alexander was doing, because (...) his knowledge on being a good leader and being loyal to his people, *inspired further emperors* right up until the 19th century (...). To me, I feel that what he did was important as he had personal goals that he wanted to achieve and he went out and tried to get them, and although they never came about, *he was still an inspiration to others* (Leah, yr 10, En 1, AG Q1).

Questions 7 and 8 of Alexander's set adds to our analysis of Questions 1 and 2. In this item (see Appendix VI) students were asked to decide over different reasons to explain why Alexander's campaigns were important and whether they could select 'one best sentence' to explain Alexander's importance. Options c) *many people learned from his example, even hundreds of years later* and (h) *he considered all races in his empire as equals* were treated as representative of symbolic and 'connection with the present' notions, respectively. Table 7.14. below shows the number of choices categorized on the basis of the reasons given as being in each type, against the total number of responses which decided it was a 'best sentence'.

**TABLE 7. 14.** Alexander the Great. Question 8: choice of "one best sentence" by types of significance

<u>AG Question 8</u>	Yr 8			Yr 10			Yr 12		
	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total	En	Sp	Total
<b>ONE BEST SENTENCE</b>	19	18	<b>37</b>	13	21	<b>34</b>	9	15	<b>24</b>
<b>CS</b>	2	2	4	1	1	2	1	1	2
<b>CA</b>	1	4	5	2	3	5	1	6	7
<b>PA</b>	5	3	8	3	7	10	1	4	5
<b>SY/PF</b>	11	9	20	7	10	17	6	4	10

**En** (English students; n = 24 / year)

**Sp** (Spanish students; n = 24 / year)

**CS** = contemporary

**CA** = causal

**PA** = pattern

**SY** = symbolic

**PF** = present / future

Although this sample is very small to generalize from, it is still helpful to be contrasted with the distribution of types we obtained in Questions 1 and 2 (see Tables 7.1 and 7.2 in pages 184 and 186). It shows that younger students can be aware of a wider range of types of attributions of significance than it was demonstrated in the first questions we studied. This suggests that, when faced with choices instead of an open question, year 8 and year 10 Spanish students may show more varied ways of understanding significance, other than contemporary and causal. In Question 8 from Alexander's task, it was shown that even if year 8 students do not usually offer symbolic reasoning or take into account the connection with the present in the first place, when considering the significance of an event (refer to absolute numbers in this type), they are nonetheless capable of ordering reasons for judging significance, and they situate the symbolic notion as first choice (both in England and Spain, see Table 7.14).

Students' justifications for choice offer deeper insights about their interpretations of each sentence from this question. Some make clear a symbolic type of reasoning:

[Int] "I chose (c). This is because if nobody learned from what he [=Alexander] did then his achievements would be wasted" (Ed, yr 12, En 6, AG Q8).

In other instances, ascription to these types (symbolic or significance for the present) is more ambiguous, because content may prevail over consideration of structural concepts in pupils' choices. For example, several students, especially from year 8, and in both countries, chose the item about equality of races as the first reason to consider the importance of Alexander, even though the stories asserted that it was not something that would last. But the issue of races is usually treated in width and depth as a sub-subject across the curriculum in most comprehensive schools in both countries. Thus the influence of content might favour here the items which, on the part of the researcher, are interpreted as a preference in relation to symbolic or present/future types of significance. Progression by grade can be detected from ideas tinged with presentism, a matter that may determine what is made of content in some cases, and in which the issue of races is seen within the urban multicultural societies of our present (Jorge), to ideas that contrast and compare prejudices of the past and our own (Marta) and arrive at a situational analysis of Alexander's behaviour (Ceris).

[Wr] I picked up (h). He taught people not to be racist just because they come from other country or because of the colour of their skins. We have to take that as an example (Jorge, yr 8, Sp 2, AG Q8).

[Wr] I think that the best sentence is (h). Because he considered all the races as equals long before these opinions were considered at all (even today they are not considered exactly as equals), and therefore he wished to give them a chance to learn and develop their culture. People's equality must exist before anything else, in my opinion (Marta, yr 10, Sp 1, AG Q8).

[Wr] I chose (h). By considering all races to be equal meant that no arguments between black + white or religions were made, and everyone was on his side (Ceris, yr 8, En 5, AG Q8).

Summarizing, the particular attribution 'symbolic' in historical significance is one of the touchstones to consider cross-cultural differences in students' ideas. Both in the quantitative and in the qualitative analysis those differences were apparent: the English students from this sample tend to allude to symbolic notions more frequently and in more depth than the Spanish ones, across tasks (with the exception of older Spanish pupils' responses to the Spanish Armada task) and year groups. These divergences could be minimized with better targeted learning and assessment activities that included varied

kinds of approaches, such as semi-open and multiple choice questions, to facilitate richer understandings of types of significance.

### **7.3.5. Significance for the present and the future**

Establishing a meaningful relationship between past, present and future is one of the main objectives of history in education, as most history curricula in Europe (and outside Europe as well) make clear. The relationship between past and present always occurs in historians' accounts: their views of the significance of events, processes and individuals are partly shaped by the present preoccupations. In pointing out the meaning of a past for the present, historians extrapolate from the evidence conclusions and lessons, and within this dialogue between present and past, both dimensions are reciprocally useful in history. Historians use the present to illuminate the past, with an awareness of the dangers of presentism, and use the past to illuminate the present, trying to answer transcendental questions such as how we have become what we are. The past is made intelligible to the present by imaginative sympathy: historians translate the conditioning circumstances of the past into terms which we can understand today: "It is in this sense that history must always be written from the point of view of the present... It is in this sense that every age will have to write its history over again" (Butterfield, 1931, 92).

That awareness, however, seems to be very poorly represented among our participants, if we look back at Tables and Graphs 7.1 and 7.2. It is the least frequently mentioned of all attributions of significance. Again, the mention of this type by students is more frequent in England than in Spain, and occurs more often in the Alexander task. The differences across tasks might be explained by the nature of the content, because generalizations in connection with the present may emerge more easily from a process such as Alexander's conquests and colonization than from a single event such as the Armada's defeat. This possibility was born in mind when the content of the research tasks was decided, because it was assumed that the Spanish decline could be seen as a long-term process, if not at the same scale, practically comparable with the repercussions of Alexander's campaigns.

In this type of significance, a distinction may be made between: posterity as an absolute; different futures at different moments in history; and 'our' present. Students' responses tend to focus on the last meaning. When the connection with the present is shown, those links are shaped at times in direct causal terms, in the sense of a linear endless transmission, as we discussed in section 7.4.2, of this chapter. Our present religious beliefs, language or

political and economic power are seen as dependent on one 'big' event, in the case of the Armada task:

[Int] "Philip wanted us to be Catholic. If he had won the war, we might be Catholic now, instead of being of different religions" (James, yr 8, En 3, SA Q1).

[Wr] If the Spanish Armada had not defeated, I could now be writing in a different language (...) (Vicky, yr 12, En 4, SA Q1).

[Int] "(...) we would not be the powerful country we are today" (Jenny, yr 10, En 4).

[Wr] I think it was important because if the Armada had defeated England it would have been a different story and England would not have been able to change things in the world (...) [Int] "SA made Elizabeth famous... England could take more land. If they had not defeated Spain, they wouldn't have invented the trade, their religion would have changed... it wouldn't have been a powerful and independent country" (Pupinder, yr 10, En 3, SA Q1).

[Wr] It was important, because the Spanish ruled over a lot of lands and if they would have ruled England as well, history would have been different, Spanish could be the most widely spoken language and the economy had developed at the same time as in England (Aida, yr 12, Sp 4, SA Q1).

Alexander's deeds, on the other hand, are less seldom understood in terms of their impact on posterity. Sometimes, the social or political uses of the past for subsequent presents are recognized:

[Wr] I think it did matter, because it said that other great leaders, such as Napoleon, learned from his work and tried to do things the way he did, and also the world might not be the same way it is now because of that (Rory, yr 8, En 1, AG Q1).

[Wr] I believe that what Alexander did was very important, because it influenced the way people look at the world, even today (Jon, yr 10, En 2, AG Q1).

[Wr] (...) He also opened up new trade routes from the East to the West, and this matters even today (Rosie, yr 10, En 6, AG Q1).

Other times, broad generalizations arise from students' interpretations of the dialogue between the present and the past:

[Wr] (...) It is important to historians what Alexander did because it was the spread of civilization and progress (Vicky, yr 12, En 4, AG Q1).

[Int] "People look back in history to look for ideas, advice, inspiration..." (Lizzie, yr 12, En 5, AG Q1).

Finally, a few students from year 12 bridge the distance between present and past with their construction of the notion of 'legacy':

[Wr] (...) Alexander's empire shows why Greek culture has its root all around different areas in the world. The fact that he introduced the single coin shows that ideas of an European currency was thought even in those times (Fareed, yr 12, En 1, AG Q1).

[Wr] It was from the Roman culture where more aspects were taken from the Greek culture; many things were taken later in Europe and Asia from the classical culture: their literature, their ideas (...) (Sonia, yr 12, Sp 3, AG Q1).

Empirical data suggest that one of the main features of history, the relation between past, present and future, is not easily grasped by students at secondary school, especially the younger ones and the Spanish ones, despite its explicit inclusion in the history curricula in both countries. A great dilemma of history is that it searches to avoid decontextualizing the past, against the dangers of presentism, or anachronistically interpreting the past in terms of the present; and, at the same time, it must demonstrate the importance of the past for the present (Seixas, 1996). Another problem is that there are not just 'two' approaches to the notion of significance, the contemporaries' and the historians', as if they were fixed upon a single stratum of temporality; on the contrary, history readers must deal with different strata of significance, thus an equilibrium must also be sought between change and continuity in historical writing (Bann, 1995). The explicit teaching of the notion of significance should help students reach more sophisticated understandings of these matters.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

### 8. 0. Introduction

This last chapter intends to synthesize major and minor findings of the exploration of the ideas that secondary school students in England and Spain hold about the notion of significance in history, starting from the research questions proposed in previous chapters. The first section summarizes the principal conclusions and particular themes arising from the main model (significance in connection to importance and variability of types) and the auxiliary models (significance in its relation to historical accounts) of cognitive progression that have been devised in this project. The second section focuses on a general discussion of findings and their implications for further research. The third section gives some possible implications for history teaching and learning.

### 8.1. Empirical model of progression

The final model of progression offered here stems from the theoretical apparatus described in Chapter 2 and is grounded in the empirical analysis developed in Chapters 6 and 7. Based on these data, it aims to describe students' cognitive progression across age groups and what similarities and differences emerge across two countries, England and Spain. This model rests on the association of three main categories: the dyad 'intrinsicity/contextuality'; the notion of 'importance'; and the classification of 'types of significance'. In addition, the study of the role of significance in historical narratives is complemented by other auxiliary categories that materialize the issue of competing interpretations in history, such as 'emplotment' and 'story parameters', 'point of view' and 'validity and truth'.

### 8.1.1. Significance and types: main model of progression

It should be remembered that 'levels' in this study are hierarchical (because sets of ideas at lower levels cannot solve certain problems that higher order of ideas can), but not narrowly developmental; as discussed above (see Chapter 3, section 3.1.1, p. 68), different conditions, apart from cognitive growth, may provide the means for a child or adolescent to attain a particular level (characteristics of the content, teaching experiences, etc.). The model develops across the levels of progression constructed in previous chapters (p. 130 and p. 193).

Major findings and conclusions were:

1. *Progression* in English and Spanish students' ideas runs from responses that indicate no awareness of the notion of importance or contextuality in historical matters, and make no allusion to types of significance or refer to the contemporary type only (Levels 1 and 2), towards responses that establish some kind of criteria to assess significance in different contexts and mention various types (Level 5.2).

2. A *crucial boundary* in this model is the stage at which students' ideas can work beyond the notion of intrinsicity and single significance, and when they are aware of different types of attributions, that is, beyond the transitional Level 2 and, especially, at Levels 4 and 5. Another *key break* is allocated between Level 4 and below and Level 5. The question is, then, when do students learn that the significance of any occurrence is relative to its frame of reference and what different perspectives particular accounts may imply? A first indicator of cognitive progression is the consideration of significance as variable within or across attributions or types of significance. A second indicator of progression is the mention of types of significance other than contemporary and causal (according to the findings discussed in Chapter 7).

3. For *lower categories*, actions, events and processes in history do not require any evaluation, or they can be evaluated in isolation. History is perceived as the unproblematic description of occurrences in chronological order; events are important per se, so significance is attached to events intrinsically, in a fixed way; it is viewed as 'obvious'. In our sample, an important proportion --almost half-- of younger students (12-13 years of age) consider significance only in intrinsic terms, as single and fixed; a slightly higher proportion among the Spanish ones. In contrast, with a similar distribution for both task-sets and in both countries, almost the totality of older students (16-17 years of age) see the significance of an occurrence as associated to context.

At *intermediate categories*, the importance of a historical event or process is seen as contextual, that is, it is evaluated in relation to its context, but it is 'fixed' insofar as no



distinction is made between rival accounts; importance at these levels is always at least associated with contemporary and/or causal types of significance or, beyond that, with other types as well. Half of younger students (fewer Spanish than English) show that they can operate within this category. For a majority of students (more English than Spanish) from 14 to 17 years of age, significance is seen as variable in a context of later events, although there is no explicit awareness of the possible conflict between accounts.

At the *highest category*, significance is seen as variable within and across each attribution; subcategories differentiate whether the clash between accounts is referred only to substantive content (factual) or also to the way both accounts are written (criterial). Responses categorized here explicitly assign different types of significance. In this sample, around 10% of year 8 students, almost 25% of year 10s and almost 40% of year 12s think in terms of variable contextual importance. In older students and, especially, at intermediate ages (14-15), more English students than Spanish ones are included in this category. English students reach the last levels of progression (Level 4 and Level 5) in a higher proportion than Spanish students in year 10 and year 12. These results suggest that sophisticated ideas can be elaborated from early ages and that English students demonstrate an earlier development in the understanding of historical significance.

4. With regard to the *variability of types*, the most frequent types of significance mentioned in students' responses are *contemporary* and *causal*. Even though this is the general case, there is a much stronger tendency in younger students than in older ones (in both countries) to justify issues of significance exclusively in contemporary terms. The majority of students, though, justify the significance of an occurrence in history in *causal* terms, by an appeal to the consequences of that occurrence; younger students mention immediate causes more frequently than mid- or long-term ones.

Confirmed by triangulation of data across different measures, 'pattern', 'symbolic' and 'present / future' types work as indicators of progression (they are present at older ages, 'contemporary' and 'causal' seeming to be a pre-requisite for higher order of ideas, as findings suggested). 'Symbolic' and 'present / future' types work additionally as pointers for differences across countries (they are always more often mentioned by the English students than by the Spanish ones).

Pattern significance is employed in a much higher proportion of responses from older students than from younger or intermediate ages. The mention of this type is more frequent among English participants in all year groups and across task-sets (except for Spanish year 12s in the Armada task-set).

*Symbolic* significance occurs more often in older students' responses and exhibits a very much higher number of responses among English students. In this particular feature, differences across countries are striking in both task-sets.

Significance *for the present and the future* is the least frequently represented among all students, particularly the younger, including those of year 10. Again, it is more frequent among English than Spanish students.

### 8.1.2. Significance and accounts: auxiliary models of progression

Auxiliary level-scales of progression in complementary categories contribute to a further understanding of students' ideas about the role of significance in historical interpretations (see pp. 144, 147, 158 and 169).

The mutual relationship of categories and empirical data gave rise to the following findings:

1. A minority of students aged 12-13 and a majority of students aged 16-17 give an explicit or implicit indication of the notion of *emplotment* in historical accounts. Within this category, year 10 English students tended to give higher level responses than Spanish ones in both task-sets (the same happened in the distribution of responses to issues of 'validity and truth').
2. For *story parameters*, the great majority of responses from year 12 students, more than a half of year 10 answers and one third of year 8 responses fall into the highest categorization in the scale. A third of students aged 12-13 do not seem to recognize differences in aspect, tone or time-scale across the stories. As an exception to the general trend that locates English students' tendency to give responses at higher levels than Spanish, English students not recognizing differences outnumber Spanish ones in year 8 in the Armada set. Specific notions of 'aboutness' and personalization of structures ('personification' or 'eventification', a tacit strategy of conversion from process to event, or the collapsing of historical events of diverse periods of time in a very short time-frame) are characteristic of this category. In both countries, these notions are more common among younger pupils, but are also present among older ones.
3. The categorization of ideas about *point of view* in the evaluation of significance in two rival accounts show that the number of students that see the issue of rival interpretations only in factual terms clearly decreases with age, and this is more pronounced among English students. One third of younger participants operates within this category, which is the least recurrent among older students.

Cross-cultural differences are more remarkable within ideas in which 'point of view' is considered as distortion, partisanship or illegitimate bias; in England, the number of

responses in this category decreases with age; in Spain, it rises from year 8 to year 12. English students are more prone to differentiate 'sense of partisanship' and 'national perspective'.

The majority of responses in both countries at all age-groups consider the notion of point of view as 'legitimate', but there is a wide range of internal variations in sets of ideas (from unqualified opinion through problems of evidence to historians' nationalities).

Progression to the highest category, 'Point of View as Necessary', is associated with age and it is similar in both countries, always in a lower number among Spanish students. 35% of older students understand that 'point of view' is unavoidable in historical narratives. More surprisingly, 27% of students aged 14-15 and 16% of those aged 12-13 may also think in these terms.

4. Attempts to deal with the *validity* of different assessments of significance in two rival accounts progress from ideas that treat the matter as a problem of evidential gaps, or clash between facts, through reasoning about disagreement in the interpretations placed on the evidence, or about variations in the period of time over which the changes are judged, to the realization that historians' work is necessarily selective, and variations of significance stem from the concentration on different aspects of the story.

This progression is found across year groups, from younger students to older ones, in both countries. A great majority of students from year 8 fit into the first category (*Factual clash*). In the other two groups, half of year 10s and less than one third of year 12s belong to this category. Less than one third in each year group fall under the second category (*Partial / Temporal conflict*). 6% of year 8 students, 21% of year 10, and almost 44% of year 12 belong to the highest category of progression (*Aspectual: alternative interpretations*).

Spanish students always outnumber English ones in considering the issue of two rival interpretations as a factual clash. Progression in issues of validity and truth in relation to significance appears to occur at earlier stages in England (between year 8 and year 10) than in Spain (between year 10 and year 12). This feature was clearly seen in the categorization of 'point of view' as well.

A majority of all students at 16 do recognize questions of authorship and method in history writing; some older students may assess variations of significance beyond the notion of aspect towards the idea of scope and focus in the narrative. Nevertheless, the majority of students in year 8 and year 10 in both countries tend to reduce 'validity' to the absolute problem of 'truth'.

## 8.2. Discussion and implications for further research

In this research sample, frequency distribution of responses into categories systematically indicates cognitive progression: year group appears always related to levels of progression in all categories across task-sets and across countries. Subcategories and internal variability in each level indicate that progression can be more effectively described at some points as a gradual process, not rigidly sliced by levels. The differences shown up in the figures tend to correspond with the nuances of the qualitative analysis.

The data suggest that English students' responses in this sample reach a higher order of ideas at an earlier age than Spanish ones, although at 16-17 the gap across countries is considerably reduced. This is apparent when we compare pace of progression across levels and ages in types of significance with parallel level-scales in issues of importance, point of view and validity. It could be suggested, then, that progression in issues of historical significance starts to occur and accelerates at earlier stages in England (between year 8 and year 10) than in Spain (between year 10 and year 12).

A general tendency emerges that in all categories Spanish students start from lower sets of ideas and progress less across age than English students do. But Spanish performance was expected to be lower than results indicate, taking into account the different teaching traditions in both countries and the Spanish students' infrequency of experience at school in issues of structural concepts and 'method' approaches to history. Nonetheless, it seems desirable to try to accelerate the pace of progression at earlier ages, particularly in Spain, because it is possible to reach higher levels, as some English students' performance showed.

The *impact of the content of research tasks* on students' responses across countries does not usually follow a well-delineated configuration. Nevertheless, it can be discerned in some of the categories. For instance, the 'pattern' type is better represented among English participants of all grades in Alexander's task, whereas it is represented by almost the same number of responses in each country in the Spanish Armada tasks. The 'present/future' type is more frequent in Alexander's task than in the Armada's. It is possible that in some questions pertaining to the Alexander's task-set the wording of the sentences led some students to think rather in factual terms than about methodological aspects. This reason connects with notions of "voiceless" prose and impersonal style pervading many current history textbooks, pointed out by various researchers (McKeown & Beck, 1994). Conversely, the Spanish Armada content seems to have facilitated the thinking about the author's role, making students' sense of partisanship and ideas about historians qua authors more visible.

*Individual degree of consistency* across tasks and questions in levels of progression appears to be somewhat weak in this study. As an example across tasks, the category of types of significance was selected from responses to Question 1 in both tasks, because this item gathered a richer variety of responses than Question 2, and levels of progression worked differently for the higher levels, when the possible conflict between stories was explicitly addressed. But we still needed to know about the comparison between different variables: question sensitiveness and task sensitiveness. Now it may be worth commenting on these two particular comparisons: a) inter task, across different content in each question (Question 1 and Question 2); and b) inter questions, across different questions (Question 1 and Question 2) in each task-set (Spanish Armada and Alexander the Great). Tables I and II in Appendix VII (pp. 326-327) show the individual degree of consistency, measured in percentages of agreement, by year group within levels of progression in types of significance, across tasks and across Questions 1 and 2.

The tables display low percentages of consistency at the level of the individual; these rates fluctuate around 50% in the comparison across tasks, and around 42% in the comparison across questions. In the latter, consistency is similar in proportion in both countries; in the comparison across tasks, consistency is higher among English students in Question 1. Nonetheless, the proportion of approximate consistency is very much higher. Most of the students whose answers are categorized as inconsistent oscillate between contiguous levels<sup>1</sup>. These relatively low rates of individual consistency reflect the internal relation between question and category and the impact of the leading question (Question 1, in this case). It seems that some ideas tend to surface only when they are directly addressed by questions, and research questions were not sharp enough to make secure remarks at an individual level; categorizations and patterns discussed in this project must be taken at group level, cross-sectionally and cross-culturally.

Comparatively, Project *Chata* work on accounts, looking globally at progression levels, even with quite crude categories, did not find significant consistency even at the group level. But so far nothing has been done to see the effect of breaking down categories into narrower strands. Question differences in *Chata* were quite marked between task-sets, even though the logic was intended to be the same. Where the tasks were identical (as in the 'causal structure' set, consistency was significant at the group level ( $\kappa = 0.6$ ) (Lee & Ashby, 1998). Nevertheless, the utility of this kind of data as diagnosis for teachers should

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<sup>1</sup> Only 13 Spanish responses (out of 48) and 10 English responses (out of 48) show a strong instability across levels of progression (i.e. the gap between levels is greater than two adjoining ones, as in a distance between Level 1 and Level 5, Level 1 and Level 3) in the comparison between different kind of content, in Question 1. In Question 2, 22 Spanish responses and 17 English ones present strong inconsistency, especially among year 12 participants, because in that case all their responses oscillate between Level 3 and Level 5 (Level 4 almost disappeared from responses to Question 2).

not be dismissed here; one of the present study's aims is offering teachers a clearer view of the patterns of ideas that students may hold in different age-groups.

Results tend to indicate a reduction of the cross-cultural distance at older ages, suggesting a link between subject-matter progression and cognitive maturation and life experience. Problems of *language*, one of the difficulties this kind of research has to cope with, are also linked to cognitive development. Yet teaching traditions may have some influence on the different behaviour observed across countries; an arbitrary use of terminology in handling second-order concepts in history is more frequent among Spanish pupils than among English ones. Research methods assumed here imply that this is an exercise of metalinguistics; students have to explain how they have come to their reasoning; in many cases, and especially in Spain, they cannot leave the frame of pure content.

Elements in this research bear on students' *sense of time*; they led us to believe that not all of them could see that the historical significance of an event or process can only be judged by considering it in the context of changes and developments over a long period of time. This is also essential to an understanding of the relationship between events, of concepts such as cause, consequence and different types of significance. The expectation was that Spanish pupils, used to line-of-development approaches to historical content, could more easily exhibit a mental framework of the past which gives significance to the study of history. In contrast, English pupils would have more difficulties in grasping this, because of the general tendency in English programs of study to 'patch history' focuses, rather than studies in development. In fact, if we look at students' responses (e.g., Question 8 of the Armada task), no clear differences across countries are detected. They tried to relate all kinds of items to a named event in the past, regardless of their distance in time. For some students in both countries (particularly the younger), two hundred years did not seem to mean anything in historical terms. The general "lack of recognition of the duration and extent of historical events" that Barton discovered in his students' perceptions (Barton, 1996) is also widespread in English and Spanish students alike, even at secondary school.

Through the study of significance, interesting implications for further understanding other second-order ideas in history have arisen as well, especially, with regard to *causal* and symbolic reasoning. Seixas established conceptual differences in students' grasp of the notion of significance as two main tendencies: 'subjectivist', which made reference to students' evaluation of occurrences according to their impact on themselves as persons or on their group; and 'objectivist', which categorized those students who analyzed the impact of occurrences in a broader historical context (Seixas, 1997). But this "impact" was considered, above all, in causal terms. What is needed, drawing these conclusions from the present study, is to delve more deeply into students' ideas towards a more elaborated understanding of other attributions of significance, beyond narrow causal connections.

Most of these students talk about possible connections in terms of 'causes' only; this rigid causal language can blind them to other kinds of relationships, such as pattern or symbolic significance. Lack of specific vocabulary might be hindering richer possibilities of thinking. To explain the different attributions of significance to which an event may respond we do not need to limit our thinking to causal links. The possibility that answer length, a variable generally associated with age, influences the irregular distribution of responses by types of significance (older students allude to more types than younger ones) could be reduced by a greater emphasis on extended writing activities from early ages in both countries.

On the other hand, we have found that the English students from this sample tend to mention *symbolic* notions more often and more incisively than the Spanish ones, across tasks (with the exception of older Spanish pupils' responses to the Spanish Armada task) and year groups. This difference of approach between English and Spanish students needs to be emphasized, because even though the research materials gave clear indications of this kind of significance to both sets of students, the English could more easily allude to it than the Spanish. Similar results were obtained in the allusion to moral judgements within given contexts; fewer Spanish than English responses were encountered that made this kind of reference, which could be interpreted as a consequence of the common tradition in Spain of teaching history centred on facts, and distanced from 'subjective' positions. This suggests that history teaching, particularly in Spain, should focus on more varied kinds of approaches which facilitate richer understandings of types of significance.

A very important issue is the influence of the *nature of the task* in students' responses. In Ashby's words, "the activity substitutes the teacher"; it is a case of question effect, the kind of activity makes the difference (Ashby, personal communication). That may help explain (apart from cognitive maturation and other conditioning characteristics) why students in Spain could reach high levels of progression, even though they have not usually experienced a methodological approach to history in their lessons. For instance, younger Spanish students performed better when the conflict issue was directly addressed; this could be considered as an exception to the general trend that more frequently situates English pupils' responses at higher levels than Spanish ones. Furthermore, when faced with choices instead of an open question (e.g. in Alexander's task), year 8 and year 10 Spanish students showed more varied ways of understanding significance, other than contemporary and causal. It was argued in previous chapters that pressure on students (from both countries) to make comparisons indicated that more of them are willing and able to consider significance as variable than would appear if no such pressure is experienced.

The content of the research tasks was selected and devised to investigate, among other things, pupils' *sense of partisanship*. Project *Chata* results suggested that "there was an

increase with age in reference to intentional distortion by authors (dogmatism, lies and bias)" (Ashby and Lee, 1998). According to the findings of the present study, it seems that Spanish students, not trained in explicit teaching about structural concepts, continued to consider the notion of point of view as illegitimate at older ages, whereas English students seem to appreciate the sense of partisanship at a younger age, even among lower achievers. However, their tendency to take sides, or to see stories as taking one side or another, could partly stem from some teaching approaches which emphasize the importance of 'looking at the two sides of any story', and from some trends in historiography that are inclined to bipolarity in historical interpretations. This is more characteristic of English teaching than Spanish, and may well be a reason why Spanish pupils are inclined to present this feature at older ages than the English, linked in a way to cognitive maturation rather than to teaching experience. Of course, looking at different versions is not the same as taking sides, but at times students do not seem to differentiate between the two. In Spain at least many older students appeared not to go beyond the issue of partisanship in a pejorative sense, whereas older English students could more often give reasons to explain rival interpretations other than deliberate manipulation.

Problems with the notion of *bias* have been already detected by British research concerned with issues of historical evidence. Some authors advocate the need to make specific distinctions between "personal bias", more easily recognized by students, and "shared beliefs and background philosophies", more problematic for many students to recognize (Ashby and Lee, 1998). This call for attention may also be relevant to the present study, for distinctions between the notions of legitimate and illegitimate points of view.

Research in the last decade has modified our perception of what should be taught and learnt in history, and how, especially the question of *interpretations* and *perspective taking*. The debate about postmodernism has made us change the notion of objectivity altogether, trying to overcome the rather simplistic binary distinction between fact and interpretation and search for a redefinition of objectivity. Therefore, "to show an understanding of the issues involved in trying to make history as objective as possible", as one of the statements of attainment in the first version of the English National Curriculum stated (DES, 1991) is not an unproblematic job.

The findings of the present research showed that some students need to develop a *sense of authorship* in history narratives, especially younger pupils. Similarly to *Chata* results, in this project older students were more likely than younger ones to dismiss ideas about the past as 'given' and to recognize authors as playing an active role in constructing narratives. Recent research about pupils' conceptions of the construction of historical knowledge warns about the danger of establishing a crude opposition between *fact* and *interpretation*, that may pupils lead to judge either "no one knows" or "it's just a matter of opinion" (Lee



and Ashby, 1998). Even though not all of them may accept it explicitly, historians suspect that neither at the level of individual descriptive statements (facts) nor at the level of the narrative organization of those statements (interpretation) is possible to disentangle the referential from the metaphorical functions of narrative (Lorenz, 1998, as was discussed in Chapter 2). Paraphrasing Geertz, understanding history entails not an advance toward an omega point, 'Truth', 'Reality', 'the World', but the restless making and unmaking of facts and ideas (Geertz, 1995, 117). Teachers may help to fill the gap between the academic discipline (that accepts the dichotomy between facts and interpretation as arguable) and the school subject (that is more usually centered on presenting a particular version of the past based on 'facts') by attracting students into the context of inquiry, or community of learners and researchers (Seixas, 1993b).

What is to be done next in the field of history education research? In a recent review of British empirical research in history education, the authors made an appeal to researchers and teachers to stop worrying only about justifications for the inclusion of history in the curriculum and rather to emphasize "work which helps history teachers to understand how pupils' thinking of ideas relevant to the teaching of their subject develops over time seems to be much needed, not least to give some grounding to the notion of progression in the curriculum" (Swinerton and Jenkins, 1999, 81). Barton had also advised that "future research might examine the way narrative understanding is manifested across a range of grade levels" (Barton, 1996, 80). The past decade's contribution of researchers from Britain, USA, Germany, Portugal and Spain, among others, shows how these suggestions are being fruitfully followed.

Contrary to some educational research, allegedly Piagetian, today it is generally accepted that children's and adolescents' cognitive abilities in history do not develop only through maturation, but depend on other variables as well. Borries reminds us that "the dependence of the logical structure of historical concepts on age may be a consequence of developmental preconditions or it may be a result of previous socialization" (Borries, 1998, 373). Recent research suggests that "the limits on people's ability to understand the past seem to be set not so much by cognitive factors as by issues such as the teaching context, the nature of the task, the use of problematic and challenging materials or the teaching styles and subject knowledge of the teacher"<sup>2</sup> (Husbands, 1996, 122). Along these lines, in-progress and future research strands in European countries are opening up new investigations of adults', adolescents' and children's ideas about conceptions of history, within the school context --as teachers and students-- and outside of that context, as dwellers of particular societies that have common features.

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<sup>2</sup> Strictly, 'cognitive factors' might be said to include these other matters, not be juxtaposed against them, but it is plain what Husbands intends.

### 8.3. Some possible implications for teaching

Recent controversies about the history curriculum in England and Spain have mainly focused on issues of content and even citizenship (QCA, 1999; Crick, 1998; Díez, 1997). What should be essential in education, though, is not so much *what* the curriculum includes but *how* it is read and discussed. A key point in history learning is trying to overcome the dilemma between offering 'one version of the past' in factual terms and combating the widespread postmodern idea that 'everything is a matter of opinion', by leading students not only to seek historical 'truth', but also to develop an awareness of authorship and to confront the consequences of the construction of the past through historical narratives.

However, this aim is far from being present in European and American history curricula and, what is more important, in classroom practice. In Spain (and also in USA and most of Western countries, in contrast to Britain), curriculum and assessment systems still tend to emphasize the pursuit of facts and details over questions of historical significance, evidence and interpretation. Teachers encounter many difficulties in "closing the gap between school and disciplinary history" (VanSledright, 1996); they need institutional support if they are to bring deep and current subject-matter knowledge and understanding into their secondary classrooms.

First of all, making the concept of significance an explicit component of history education should be one of the goals of history curriculum reform. "Questions of curriculum selection, textbook construction, historical interpretation --the meaning of 'history' itself-- all hinge on the question of significance" (Seixas, 1997, 27). Yet there is just a bare reference to the concept in the English curriculum, with no attention to any development of progression, whereas in the Spanish curriculum no direct allusion is made, and it is supposed to be implied in general references to the issue of interpretations (see Chapter 1, section 1.4.2).

The findings of this research have illustrated that no astonishing divergences appear in this comparative study, but subtle distinctions are not less relevant. Spanish data showed a consistent delay (through tasks and categories) in the acquisition of more sophisticated levels of ideas in comparison with English data. To Spanish students (especially the younger) it seemed less clear that history is not given, but researched, and a majority of them could not fully appreciate that to find out about the past one has to engage in research rather than simply accepting an authorized version from above.

The treatment of history as mere information has also implications for students' life out of school, when they must confront issues of information handling, not only in history or science at school, but also when dealing with the Internet or watching the media. Recent

American research that investigates students learning stories *outside* schools has suggested that in some circumstances they are more likely to believe the outside versions than the stories learnt inside school (Wertsch & Rozin, 1998; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). What *only school* is likely to do is to teach the second-order, disciplinary understandings. Moreover, history in the curricula of both countries is seen as a good vehicle to start internalizing higher order of ideas or sets of ideas, and make possible the transference to all kinds of contexts. It is basic that students learn how to determine what is 'valid to assert' rather than to seek what is 'true in fact' (Shemilt, 1992); until then, they will keep on saying that anyone can guess or give an opinion.

In contrast, many students in the research sample were worried about 'finding the right answer', and this happened not only among the Spanish. It seems that Joseph's words may still be applicable to the current situation in history teaching and learning; according to him, one of the aims for students of history should be

to use their reason as well as their memories, and to develop skills<sup>3</sup> of analysis and criticism in a situation where there cannot be a right answer (Joseph, 1984).

As discussed above, facing two alternative accounts, the perspective of facts as unarguable often appears in Spanish students. For instance, a sample Spanish pupil replied: "Story 1 tries to reduce the importance of the defeat, while Story 2 tells what really happened..." (Alberto, yr 12, Sp 2, SA Q7), whereas the English spoke more frequently of the point of view of each story. The insistence in a single significance is still quite common in textbooks and activity books in schools, particularly in Spain. Teaching resources require more careful targeting to allow teachers to deploy new tools to practise innovative styles and methods, especially in Spain, but also in England.

Besides, caution is needed with the criticisms of "traditional" interpretations that may make pupils believe that today we have reached the 'right' answer. In an English pupil's words;

[Int] "We've been learning that it wasn't really an English victory, but a Spanish mistake... I think in the long term it was more important for the English" // "Maybe it's been written long ago... maybe twenty years ago...they haven't decided yet what is right" (Fraser, yr 8, En 6, SA Q9 and SA Q1).

Efforts should be made to carry out activities that support the idea that progress in historical knowledge and understanding does not mean the continuous search for ultimate answers; on the contrary, what is necessary is to understand an essential feature of the

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted here that, rather than 'skills', it is understandings that matter; these are what this research has been concerned with.

discipline, that history is subject to constant reinterpretation. And this is not unanimously practised in history classrooms.

If we are to confront some students' inflexible consideration of the issue of historians holding a point of view, we may have to make pupils aware that statements in history must be subject to validation by methods and criteria which are, in principle, designed to reduce the impact of partisanship. Teachers may think that they have achieved enough when they help pupils to realize that history may be manipulated and usually written by the winners. But there is more to be accomplished, particularly by the older students. The objective would be to help them see the positive values of historians' subjectivity, as a means for bringing new ideas, new questions into the historical sciences from outside, as against the tendency to develop ingenuity for its own sake (Hobsbawm, 1997).

With respect to the issues of 'personification' and 'eventification', students' limited perception of the expanse of history could be addressed, following Barton's suggestions, by devoting attention to notions of continuity in history, to gradual and long-term changes, rather than to dramatic events only (Barton, 1996); these changes in approach should take place in the early years of secondary school<sup>4</sup>.

The danger of causal reductionism detected in many pupils' ideas about historical significance also calls for attention. The need to provide students with tools that allow them to reason at more elaborated levels should be emphasized: the potential is there; students of all age-groups can reach higher levels of progression, e.g., expanding their ways of understanding beyond causal connections in all year groups. Causation in history does not work as in the natural sciences, and that might be one of the reasons why some students fail to think about all the possible relationships of an occurrence with its different contexts. This distinction between evaluating the causal force of an event or a process and assessing its significance has been central in this research in the construction of categories and establishment of levels of progression. A conceptual leap in history curricula should be taken from a framework constructed upon substantive concepts (what the results of an event have been) to a framework based on second-order concepts (setting criteria to assess significance in different contexts).

This research has also shown relevant cross-cultural differences in relation to the understanding of various types of significance, in particular, with regard to the types that have been considered in our model as indicators of higher levels of sophistication, that is, pattern, symbolic and present/future notions of significance. All three types are essential to understand the nature of history in issues of change, the uses of the past and the connection

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<sup>4</sup> The experience in England acquired through the School History Project (see Chapter 1, section 1.2.2) in teaching developmental studies was largely lost in the National Curriculum, partly because it became muddled with issues of content coherence.

past present, and these features are recognized as indispensable focuses of the history curriculum. They are of special importance for students' thinking about alternative accounts. However, Spanish students seem to operate with a less sophisticated or, at least, less rich, conceptual apparatus here, so the problem is an urgent one, and perhaps should be tackled by specific teaching which explicitly addressed these features.

The type of significance least frequently mentioned in the empirical data was the connection of the past with *the present and the future*. Borries sees a danger of presentism in the intentions of current educational policies to transfer today's 'scientific ideology', 'moral standards' and a 'secular conception of mankind and the world' to all previous epochs in history (Borries, 1998, 373). As discussed above, two main dilemmas in history are our need to search for an equilibrium between closeness and distance to and from the past; and the tension between the view of historical significance as something related just to the past in itself, and the view that history should be applied directly to contemporary issues, as part of 'values education'. More frequent explicit teaching of the relation between past, present and future should happen in our schools to help overcome these difficulties and to encourage students to reflect about how this relationship is worked out in historical accounts; how historians' views of the significance of events and processes are shaped by the preoccupations of the present as well as by their knowledge of the past (see also Davis et al., 2000).

Finally, it may be important to stress that practical classroom activities should be research-oriented. It has been seen above that the reduction of the expected gap between Spanish and English levels of responses could be partly explained by the argument of activity-driven answers (particularly targeted activities); but, even if teaching practices differ, levels of achievement may result closer than expected in both countries. Sometimes it is useful to work with non-emotional or non-contentious tasks to avoid, for example, confusions between legitimate and illegitimate viewpoints. On the other hand, some inconsistencies across tasks for the same kind of question in this study might be explained by "the emotional commitment to the past", the value-laden nature of historical knowledge (Booth, 1980; Barca-Oliveira, 1996), clearer in the Spanish Armada task-set than in the Alexander the Great one. This may help explain why the older Spanish pupils reached higher levels of ideas in the pattern notion of significance in the Armada's task than the English did<sup>5</sup>.

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, "teachers can use research findings to help them make sense of their own pupils' work or use the research instruments developed by researchers to explore the ways in which their own pupils explain historical events"

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<sup>5</sup> Another contributory cause, already mentioned, could be that Spanish pupils may have a longer-term pattern to fit into the event of the Armada.

(Pendry et al., 1996, 131). Research may give support to teachers to delineate what can be done with students at each category of progression; students' assessment consistent with their conceptual (or 'construct') levels must be developed, and their learning must be boosted to help them beyond their initial levels (Barca-Oliveira, 1996).

Research on second-order concepts and ideas --an area in which there are unequivocal signs of convergence between the main strands of research from different countries (see for example Lee and Ashby, 2000)-- has shown its utility in devising construct-levels for history education purposes across nations. This study is intended to be a contribution to a better view of students' ideas in historical second-order concepts in two countries of the European Union. Along these lines, it is possible to build up more accurate constructs that help us evaluate better the progression in students' ideas, with a common substratum across European countries upon which more efficient models of progression can be elaborated. This kind of research aims to be collaborative, not competitive. Comparative research is not seen here as a quest for international 'best practice', but "a genuine desire to establish what is common and what particular in pupils' learning about the construction of the past" (Shemilt, 1998). Finally, research in the field should try to supersede the idea of school history as a means to promote citizenship and national identity, if only because nowadays the question is not the encouragement of a concrete national identity, but the interaction of an individual's multiple identities. The alternative is to orientate research towards notions of historical consciousness and ideas beyond national identity. History education has its own agenda, and if we agree that history is a worthwhile component in any curriculum concerned with inducting students into rational forms of thought, a key interest must be not only with students' understanding of historical knowledge and facts, but also with their understanding of the processes that historians use in creating their subject.

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**APPENDIX I**

## THE SPANISH ARMADA (PART I)

In 1588, king Philip II of Spain sent an Armada (which is the Spanish word for a fleet of armed ships) to attack England. England's queen was Elizabeth I.

### The Monarchs and their countries

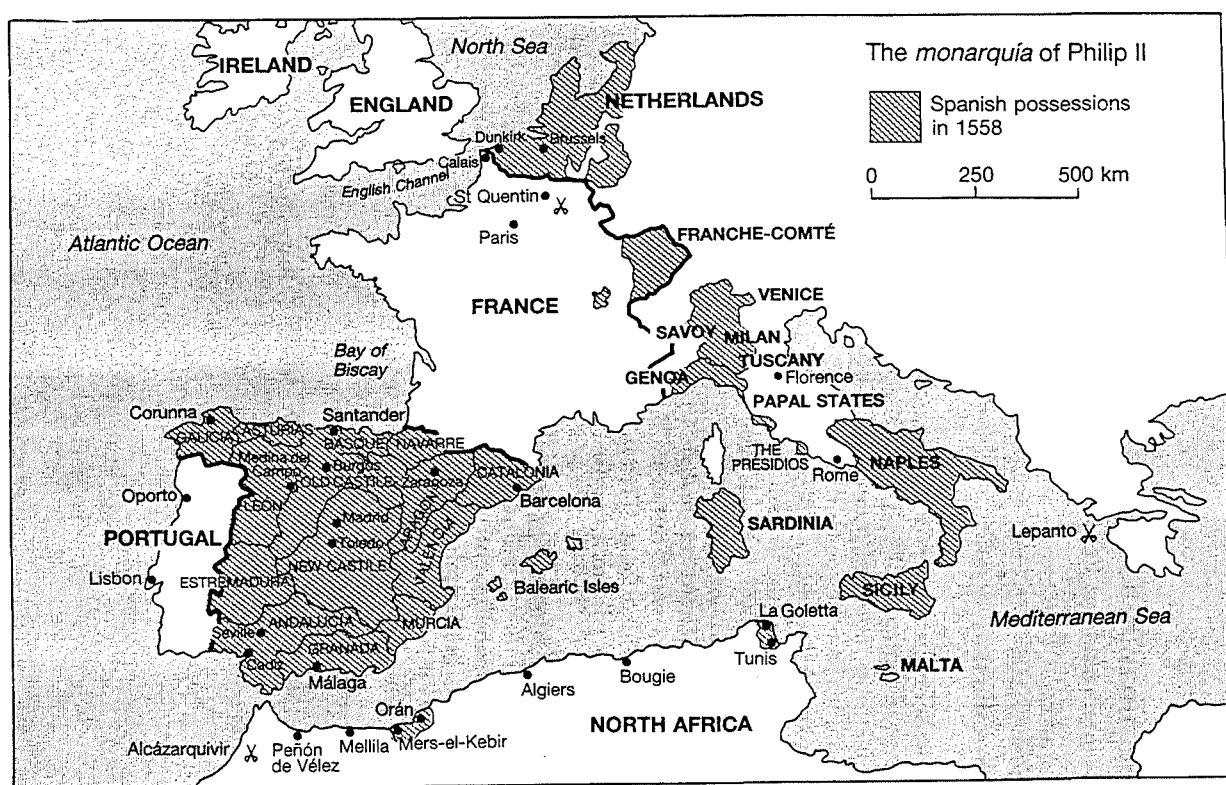
**Philip II of Spain** (1556-1598) was the most powerful ruler in the Western world. As well as being king of Spain, he owned large areas of Europe, most of Central and South America and some rich islands called the Philippines in the Pacific ocean (see maps 1 and 2). The Spanish Empire was very rich. America provided Philip with huge amounts of gold and silver. One of the richest countries in Europe was the Netherlands (Holland and Belgium), which also belonged to the Spanish Empire, and was famous for its bankers and traders.

**Elizabeth I** became queen of **England** in 1558. At that time England was a small country compared with her European neighbours, France and Spain. It had a small population of probably only three or four million people (Spain without its empire had eight million). Most of the people lived and worked by farming. There had always been many sailors in England (fishermen and traders); when new countries were discovered, they saw the chance of making money from trading voyages to these countries.



But Spain itself was not a very wealthy country. Kings and queens in the 16th century considered their kingdoms as personal property. Good kings and queens were supposed to make sure they at least held on to the countries they had started with or, better still, took over some more. Since the times of Charles I, kings of Spain had used most of their gold from America to pay for the wars in

Europe. As time went on, the Spanish government needed more and more money for these wars. It began to borrow huge sums of money from foreign banks and from its own people. Spanish citizens preferred to make money by lending it to the government and getting lots of money in interest, rather than invest it in Spain's businesses. So industries and business in Spain suffered.

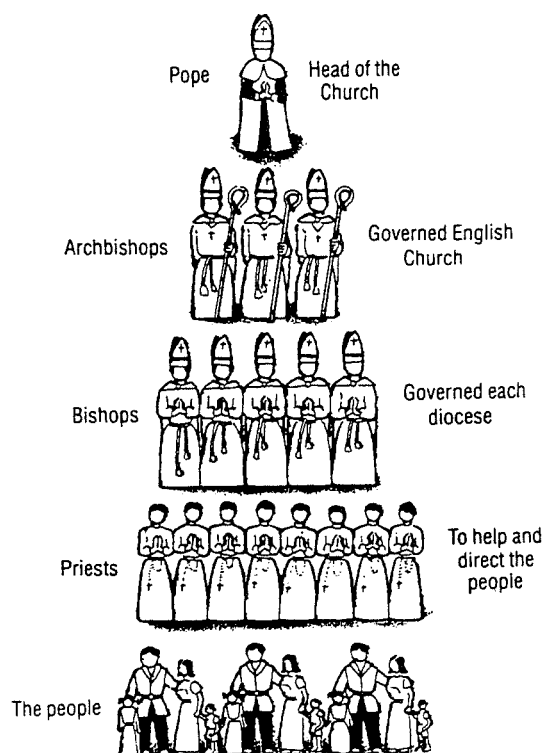


Map 1: SPANISH EMPIRE IN EUROPE

## Catholics and Protestants

Most people in West Europe were Christians and belonged to the Catholic Church. The Church owned large amounts of farmland.

The head of the Church was the Pope. The Pope was also a powerful ruler; he ruled part of Italy just as a king would. Besides, he thought himself to be God's representative on earth. So he was entitled to tell Christians what to believe. He had the right to tell kings and queens what to do in religious matters. Kings who were backed by the Pope had in the defence of religion a good excuse to conquer another king's lands.



## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Henry VIII, Elizabeth's father, had broken away from the Catholic Church and set up the Church of England. His eldest daughter, Mary, became queen and took England back into the Catholic Church. But not everyone was glad to let England be Catholic again. Protestants were forced to become Catholics during Mary's rule. Some of those who refused were burned (see picture).



## BURNING OF PROTESTANTS

Mary, married to Philip II of Spain, died childless. When Elizabeth succeeded her, Philip proposed marriage to the new queen, to consolidate his alliance with the English (mainly against France), but she refused.

Although Philip's attitude to England was friendly at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, it became clear very soon that she was a Protestant. Philip of Spain was a Catholic and a deeply religious man. He was devoted to the Catholic faith and he honestly believed that God was on his side in any war against Protestants.

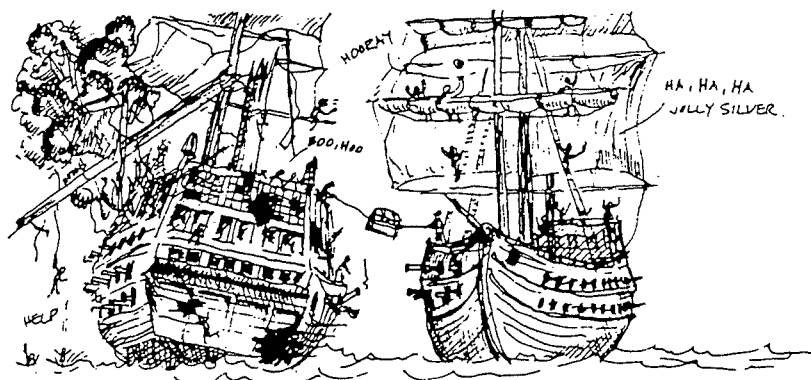
In 1570, the pope excommunicated Elizabeth (expelled her from the Christian community). As a response, the Parliament issued a law by which Catholic priests in England were

prevented to try to make people become Catholic. The leading English Catholics sought help from Philip of Spain.



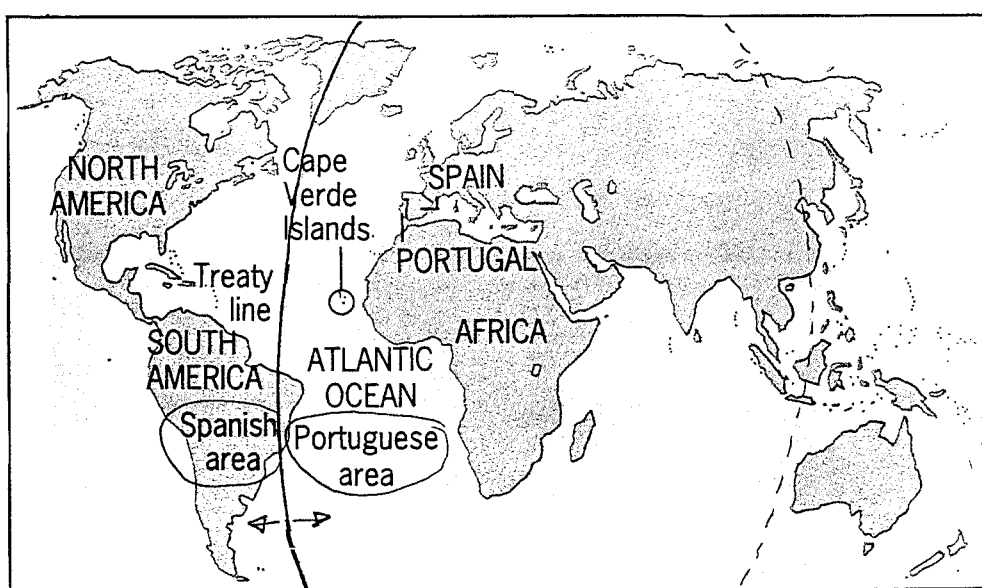
CATHOLIC PLOTS

## Seamen and Traders



After the Spanish and Portuguese arrived in the New World (1490s), they said that they were the only countries with the right to sail there. The Pope had made it official: he divided up the world into the Spanish part and the Portuguese part (see map). But other countries, such as France or England refused to accept this.

From the 1570s there had been an undeclared war at sea between England and Spain. English ships attacked Spanish merchant ships and ports in Central and South America. Famous seamen, like John Hawkins or Francis Drake, were seen as heroes in England, whereas Spain saw them as pirates and robbers. In 1587 Drake went as far as to attack the port of Cádiz in Spain.



DIVISION MADE BY THE POPE



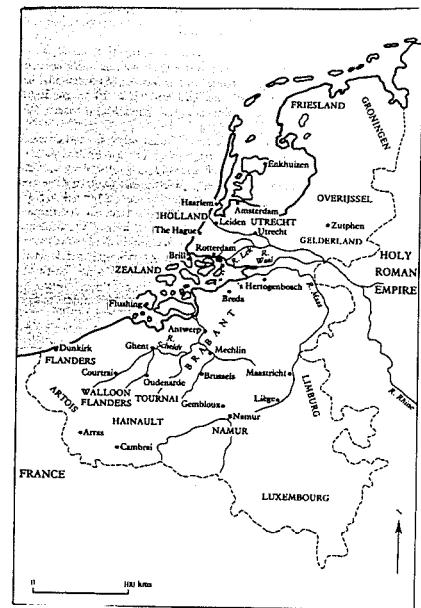
## Adversaries within the Empire

Philip also had to control opposition inside the boundaries of his huge empire. Not everyone in the territories of the empire agreed to be under the Spanish king's rule. Some countries, such as Portugal, where Philip had been king since 1580, and Holland, wanted to run things their own way. They turned to Spain's enemies, such as France or England, for help. Even though the

Portuguese were the same religion (Catholic) as Philip, they still tried to get England help against him. Philip had made tough laws against Protestants in Holland. The Dutch rebelled. Elizabeth interfered on the rebels' side and sent an army to back up the Dutch in their struggle. From 1572 onward, dealing with Holland's revolt was the most expensive thing Philip had to pay for..



PORTUGAL



THE NETHERLANDS

In 1588, Philip II decided to send a fleet of armed ships, the *Invincible Armada*, to invade England.

NAME:		DATE:
COURSE:	AGE:	
SCHOOL:	BIRTHDAY:	

QUESTION 1

**1.1. Why do you think Philip decided to send the Armada against England?**

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**1.2. Now you have explained why Philip decided to send the Armada, does anything still puzzle you about why he sent it?**

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NAME:		DATE:
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**QUESTION 2**

Two historians give different explanations of why Philip decided to send the Armada against England:

**A**

*Philip II of Spain sent the Armada against England to take revenge on Drake.*

**B**

*Philip II of Spain sent the Armada against England to stop the English from interfering in America*

**2.1. Is one explanation better than the other? Say why you think so.**

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**2.2. How could you check if one explanation is better than the other?**

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**2.3. How can there be two different explanations of the same thing?**

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NAME:		DATE:
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SCHOOL:	BIRTHDAY:	

### QUESTION 3

**Philip's main problem within his Empire was the Dutch rebellion.**

**Philip's main rival in Europe was France.**

**Philip had been allied with England, and had been married to an English queen,**

**SO**

**Why did Philip II of Spain send the Armada against England?**

1. Philip II wanted to rule over England.
2. England was helping the rebels against Spain in Holland and Portugal.
3. Philip II needed to defend his Empire.
4. Philip wanted revenge on Drake.
5. Kings usually tried to conquer other countries.
6. The Pope was acting through Spain to overthrow Elizabeth .
7. Philip was Catholic and Elizabeth was Protestant.
8. English ships used to attack Spanish ships coming from America.
9. Philip disliked Elizabeth because she had refused to marry him.
10. Philip was convinced that the invasion of England was God's will.

**3.1. Do you think all the statements help explain why Philip decided to send the Armada? Say why.**

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NAME:		DATE:
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**3.2 Pick up the best explanations and say why you did so.**

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**3.3 Pick up the explanations that are less good and say why you did so.**

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**3.4 Pick up the explanations that are no good and say why you did so.**

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NAME:		DATE:
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#### QUESTION 4

Read the list of sentences 1-6 below.

Decide if any of the things in the list would have made a difference to Philip's decision to send the Armada, or not.

Put a tick (✓) if it would have made a difference.

Put a cross (×) if it would not have made a difference.

*Philip's decision to send the Armada would/ would not have been different if...*

- ☐ 1. Holland had not rebelled against Philip.
- ☐ 2. There had been no gold in America.
- ☐ 3. The Pope had not excommunicated Elizabeth.
- ☐ 4. Drake had not attacked Cádiz.
- ☐ 5. Elizabeth had been Catholic.
- ☐ 6. England had not helped the rebels in Holland.

Choose the two sentences that you think would have been most likely to make a difference. Say why.

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## APPENDIX II



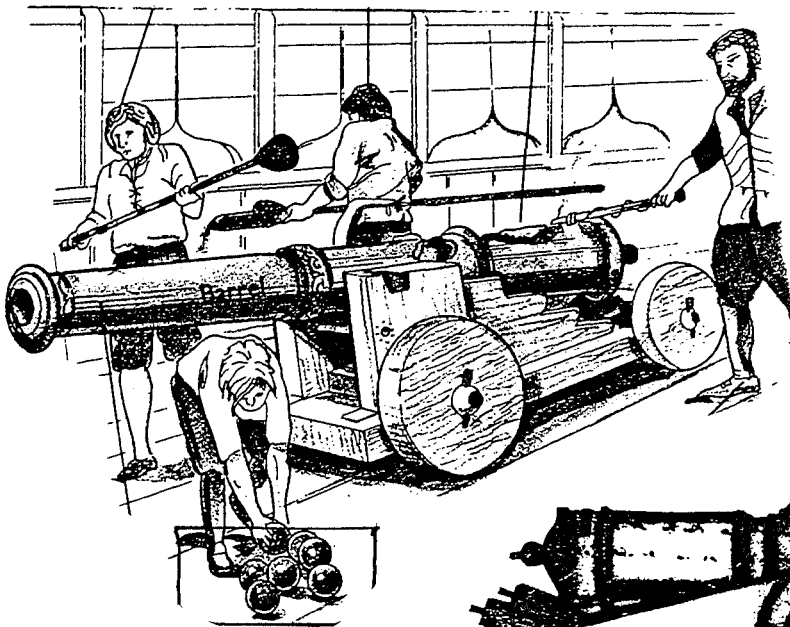
## THE SPANISH ARMADA (PART II)

### The sailing of the Armada

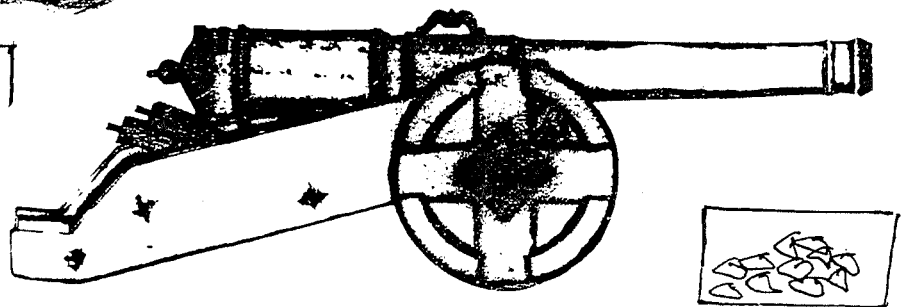
In 1586, Philip had finalized the plans for the invasion of England. But the sailing of the Armada had to be delayed several times; one of them, after Drake's attack over Cádiz. There were also problems of provisioning; Spanish industries could not produce all the supplies the Armada needed. Besides, a lot of resources were spent in the wars in Europe.

Nevertheless, Philip's plans would be carried on. The Duke of Parma's army in the Dutch coast would cross to England in barges, march on London and

force Elizabeth to negotiate. The Armada would sail from Lisbon to protect Parma's ships across the Channel and to carry weapons and equipment needed for the land battle. This fleet would carry an extra 20.000 soldiers to help Parma's forces. But the captain that had been appointed died. Philip chose the Duke of Medina-Sidonia to take his place. He was inexperienced at sea, but he had shown his ability in previous campaigns to organize and supply military expeditions, and he had been always a good servant to the king.



ENGLISH GUN

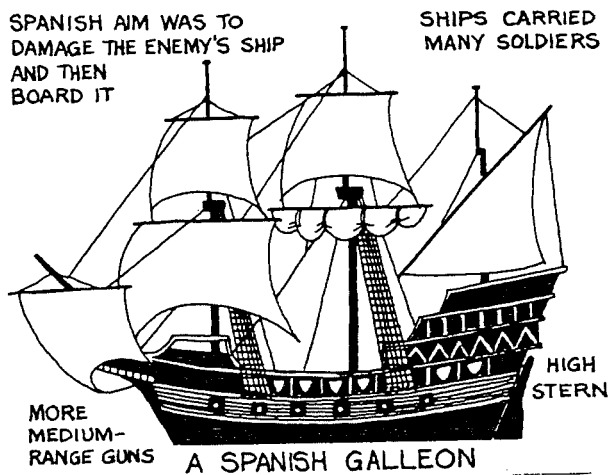


SPANISH GUN

### The Spanish Armada

It included merchant ships, galleons and galleasses. Galleons were the fastest. Galleasses were slow, but heavily armed.

It was better at close range than the English fleet. It had more medium and short range guns. The Spanish fired their guns too slowly.



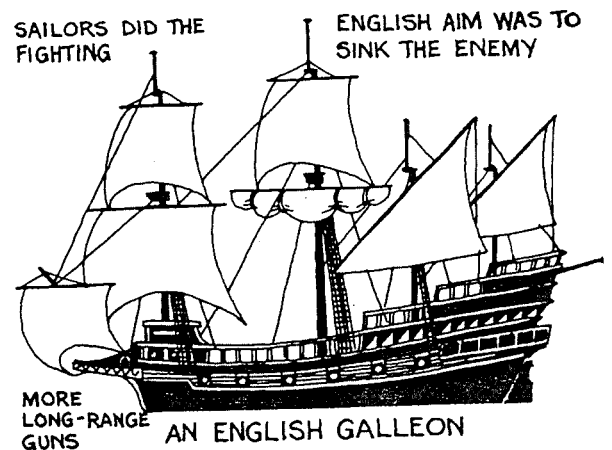
The Spanish were disciplined, good seamen and had good maps. Their fleet carried a large number of soldiers.

The Spanish usually fought sea battles by putting their ships near to the enemy ships. Then, soldiers went sent on board to capture the ships.

### The English fleet

The newest English galleons were the best fighting ships of the day. They were faster and easier to sail than the Spanish.

It was armed with guns called culverins which could fire a lot further than Spanish guns. The English could fire their guns three times faster than the Spanish.



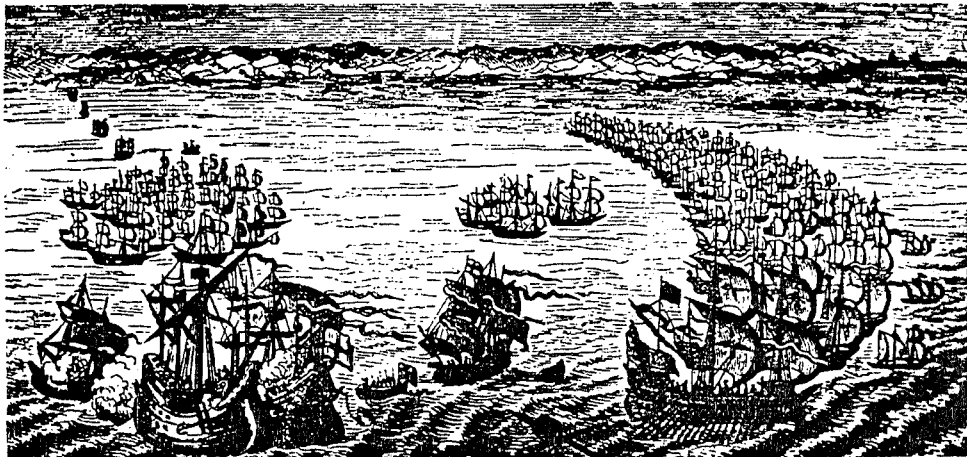
Almost all the crew of an English ship were sailors. They knew the Channel waters well. But they had fewer men and a long coast to defend.

English ships were too quick to be caught.

## The battles and the retreat

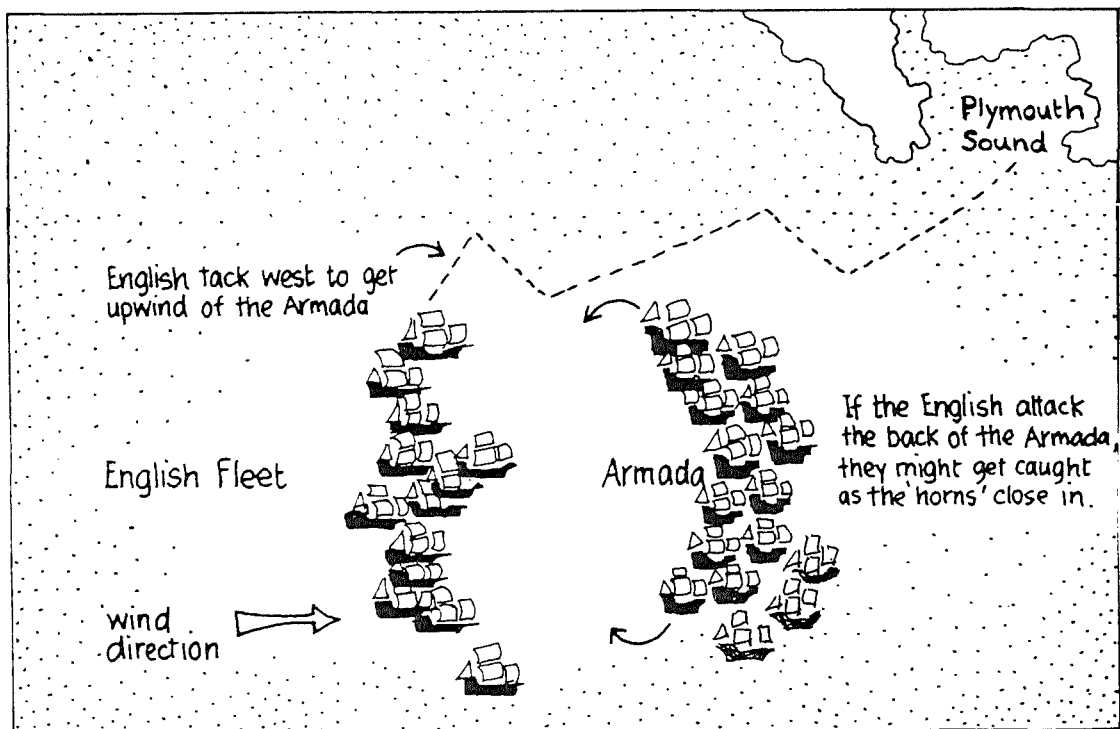
In July 1588, the Armada moved slowly up the Channel. It overcame the first encounters with the English fleet by skilfully keeping a crescent defensive formation (see picture and map). But when it anchored off Calais to wait for the Spanish army, the English attacked with "fireships". These were empty ships, filled with tar and gunpowder, which were set alight and sent downwind towards the enemy. The Armada was

scattered over the sea. When the Spanish could regroup their ships, there were fierce battles between the two fleet. The Spanish soldiers tried to grapple and board the English ships, but the English ships were too quick to be caught. The English poured gunfire into the enemy galleons until they had no more ammunition, whereas the Spanish fired their big guns too slowly.



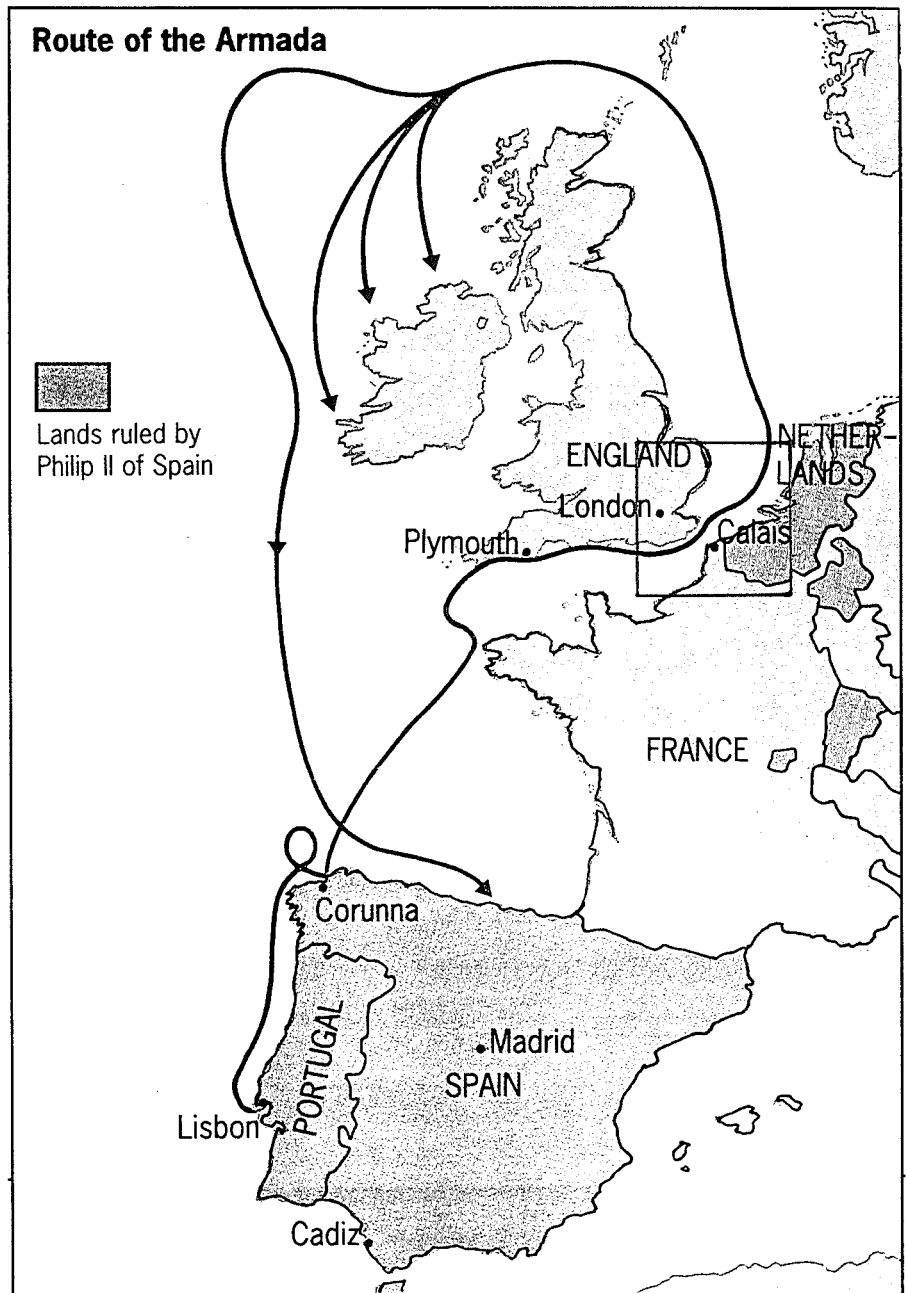
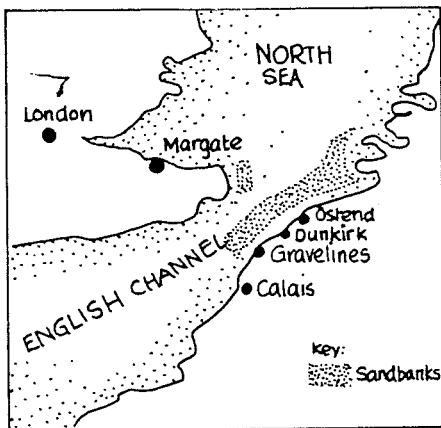
ENGLISH  
FLEET

SPANISH  
FLEET



The Spanish ships were short of food and water, and had been so badly damaged that they could fight no more. They did not have a deep-water port on the Dutch coast to shelter and refit their fleet. The English blocked the return passage south. Medina Sidonia and his

captains could not turn round and join up with Parma; they had to sail north, round Scotland and west of Ireland, to get home (see maps). Rough winds and high seas made that only 90 ships out of 128 returned to Spain. Some 15,000 of the men on board had died.



NAME:		DATE:
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QUESTION 1

**Why was the Armada defeated?**

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NAME:		DATE:
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### QUESTION 2

Three historians give different explanations of why the Armada failed to land a Spanish army in England:

#### **A**

The Armada failed to land a Spanish army in England, although it had about 130 ships, carrying more than 20,000 soldiers and sailors, and they were kept in tight formation which the English could not break up. The English had ships which were far easier to sail than the Spanish ones, and their guns could fire three times faster than the Spanish.

#### **B**

The Armada failed to land a Spanish army in England because English ships, weapons and tactics proved more effective than the Spanish ones. Besides, the Spanish army in the Dutch coast and the Spanish fleet could not link up.

#### **C**

The Armada failed to land a Spanish army in England because Spain could not send a really 'invincible' fleet, as Spain had to spend a lot of money in Europe for the defence of its Empire.

**2.1. Is one explanation better than the others? Why?**

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NAME:		DATE:
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**2. 2. Is there any relationship between B and C? If so, can you explain the relationship between them? If not, can you explain why there is none?**

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**2. 3. Now could you give a better explanation of why the Armada failed to land a Spanish army in England?**

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**APPENDIX III**



## THE SPANISH ARMADA (Part III)

### After the defeat

The English thought that the Spanish Armada's defeat was a great naval victory. There was tremendous celebration in England. English Protestants were sure the defeat showed God was on their side. Queen Elizabeth became very popular with her people.

Philip accepted the disaster of his Armada as God's will. He said to Medina-Sidonia: "I sent you out to war with men, not with the wind and waves". Spain was shocked, but not beaten. The war went on. The Spanish helped some Irish Catholics to fight the English. English ships still attacked Spanish ships. In 1596 and 1597 Armadas were launched again, but they were driven back by storms. Elizabeth spent a fortune on the defence of England. England

survived as an independent, Protestant, country. But neither Philip nor Elizabeth ever tried to reach a compromise. Peace came in 1604, when both king and queen had died.

The other country to benefit from the Spanish defeat was Holland. The Dutch revolt against Spanish rule went on, with occasional truces and English help. Philip in fact lost Holland by the end of his reign, although he never admitted it; he still kept the southern part of the Netherlands in his Empire. Holland finally became a separate country in 1648.

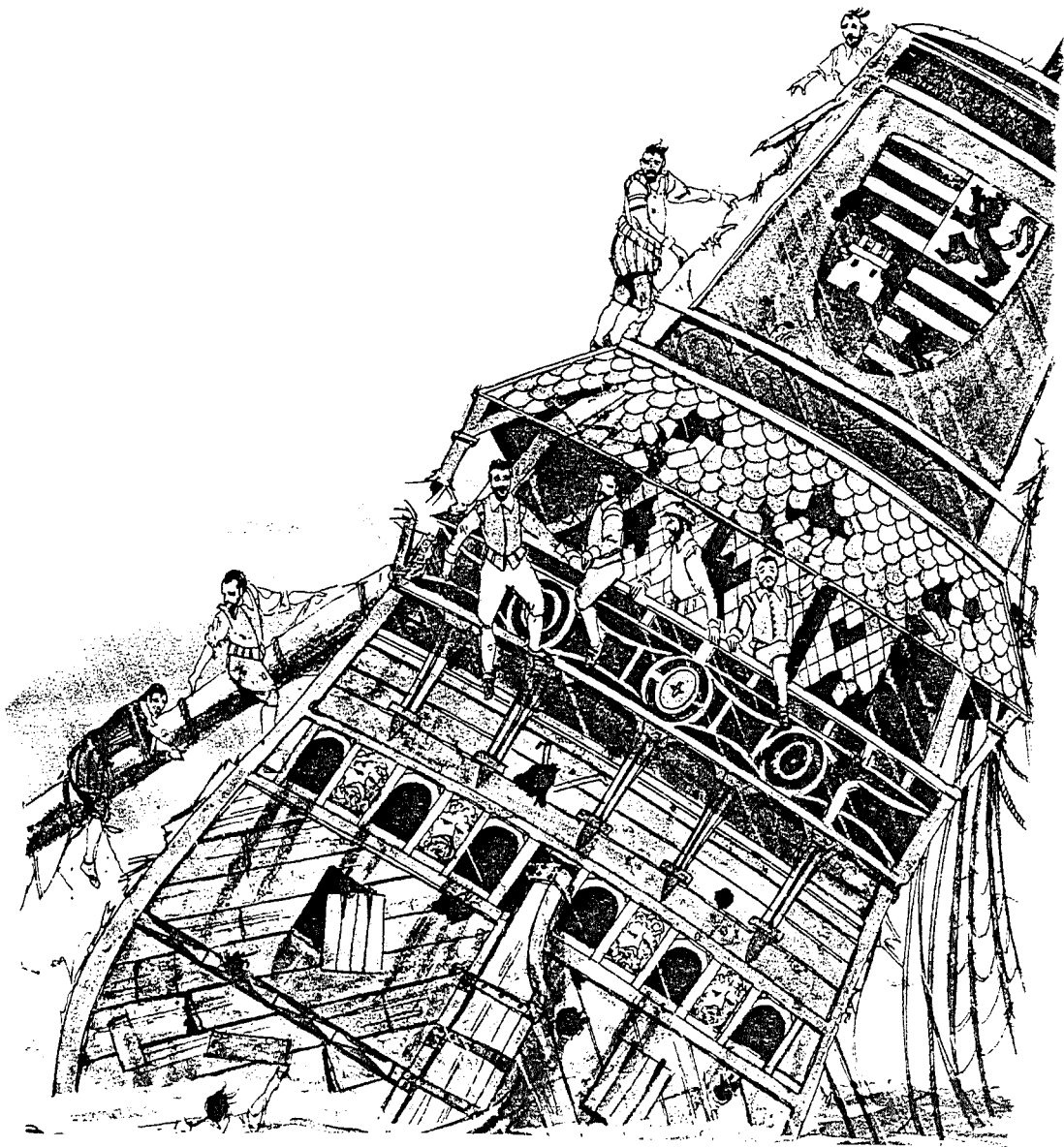
Portugal began a revolt in 1640, and finally became independent from the Spanish Empire in 1668.



Philip's wars against England and other countries had made him spend big sums of money with little result, and the Spanish people suffered. By the end of Philip's reign, farmers produced less food; traders and artisans had to pay heavy taxes. In spite of these serious economic effects, Spain still had one of the most powerful armies in Europe. Spain was one of the most important countries in Europe, and it kept its

European Empire until the Eighteenth century.

In the Seventeenth century, both the English and the Dutch began to set up colonies in America and Asia. Spain hung on to master Central and South America. The English managed to establish settlers in parts of America that the Spanish had ignored, and the English and the Dutch would develop a successful empire in the East Indies.



NAME:		DATE:
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**QUESTION 1**

**1.1. On the basis of the account you have read, do you think the defeat of the Armada was an important event in history?**

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**1. 2. In what ways (if any) is it important?**

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**1.3. In what ways (if any) is it not important?**

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NAME:		DATE:
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**QUESTION 2**

Two historians give these different interpretations of the events of the Armada:

A	B
If any one year marks the division between triumphant Spain and defeated, disillusioned Spain, that year is 1588 (the year of the Armada).	The Armada's defeat was a military failure, but not the beginning of the decline of Spain. The fear of Spanish power in England would last well into the Seventeenth century.

**2. 1. What reasons do you think historian A could give for saying this?**

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**2. 2. What reasons do you think historian B could give for saying this?**

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**2. 3. How is it possible in history to have such different interpretations of the same thing?**

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**APPENDIX IV**

Read the following stories:

### STORY 1

After the Armada's defeat in 1588, a secretary of king Philip said: "We have lost our reputation as invincible warriors". But Philip still sent new Armadas, although they did not succeed because of storms.

The war costed a lot, and state debts increased in both England and Spain. In spite of the economic difficulties, Spain had one of the most powerful armies in Europe.

The Dutch Protestant revolt against Spain went on until 1648, when Holland finally became a separate country. Protestantism kept on being the favoured religion in England, but the Spanish helped some English Catholics in their attempts to take over England.

The defeat of the Armada' did not prevent Philip II to be the most powerful king in the Christian world.

In the Seventeenth century, Spanish economy decline because there were cycles of bad weather which caused crops to fail; besides, plague spread and population decreased. Because of these problems, and due to the huge size of the Empire, Spain had trouble in defending its colonies in America and Asia, attacked by the Dutch and the English. Portugal became independent from the Spanish Empire in 1668.

In the Seventeenth century, both the English and the Dutch began to set colonies in America and Asia. The English managed to establish settlers in parts of America that the Spanish had ignored.

Spain kept its European Empire until the Eighteenth century, and hung on to master Central and South America and islands in the Pacific.

### STORY 2

After the Armada's defeat in 1588, there was tremendous celebration in England. The English thought God was on their side; they said: "God blew and they were scattered". The war went on. English ships still attacked Spanish ships and new Armadas were launched by Spain, but these were driven back by storms. Queen Elizabeth decided to spend more money in the building of new fleets.

England survived as an independent, Protestant, country. The Catholics could not take over England. Holland also benefited from the defeat of 1588; the Dutch Protestants prospered; Holland became an independent country in 1648.

The defeat of the Armada was a decisive set back to Philip II and the Spanish Empire. It was the beginning of the Empire's decline. In the Seventeenth century, Spain gradually became weaker.

In the Seventeenth century, the English established settlers in Virginia (North America) and set up colonies in India. English sailors thought they could make money easily by trading with those countries.

Spain lost its European Empire in 1713, and most of the American colonies in 1810-1830. The Spanish defeat of Trafalgar (1805) showed England's superiority at sea.

At the end of the Eighteenth century, England was the pioneer of the industrial revolution, whereas Spain's economy developed much later.

By 1850, Britain was the most advanced industrial country and had the most powerful navy. By the end of the Nineteenth century, Britain had a big Empire and Spain had none.

NAME:		DATE:
COURSE:	AGE:	
SCHOOL:	BIRTHDAY:	

QUESTION 1

Some historians think that the Spanish Armada's defeat was really important; others think it wasn't. What do you think? Was it important or not? Explain why it mattered or why it did not matter.

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QUESTION 2

Does the Spanish Armada's defeat matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?

Choose one answer (YES or NO)

YES: If it you think it does matter the same, explain how.

NO: If it you think it doesn't matter the same, explain why not.

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QUESTION 3

**What makes things important in history?**

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**APPENDIX V**

## THE SPANISH ARMADA

- In **1588**, King Philip II of Spain sent an *Armada* (which is the Spanish word for a fleet of armed ships) to invade England. England's queen was Elizabeth I.



**Philip II of Spain**



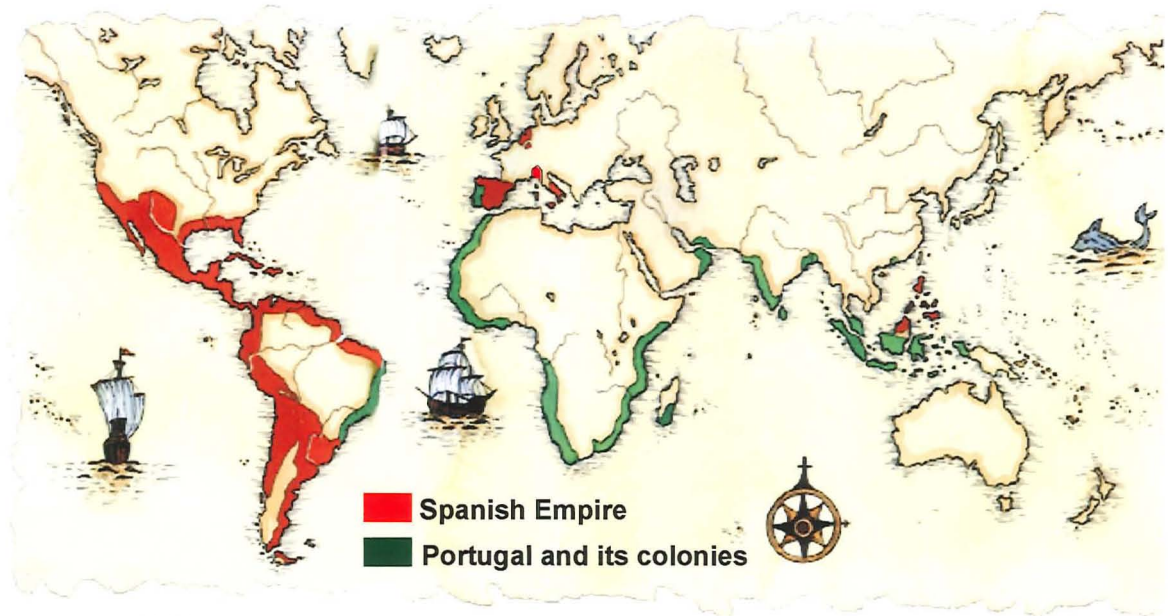
**Elizabeth I of England**

- Most people in Europe were Christians but they were divided between Catholics and Protestants. The Protestants had broken away from the Pope, who was the head of the Catholic church. Philip II was the most powerful ruler in the Western world; he was Catholic. Elizabeth I was Protestant. People in England were afraid of Philip; they thought he wanted to force England to be Catholic. They also wanted to trade with America, whereas the Spanish and Portuguese thought that only themselves had the right to buy and sell things there.
- The Spanish Empire was huge; since 1580, Portugal and its colonies were also ruled by Philip II (see maps). To keep the Empire together, Philip II had to fight many wars in Europe and at sea. English ships attacked Spanish merchant ships and ports in America. Holland, which belonged to the Spanish Empire, had become Protestant and rebelled against Philip. England had sent armies to back up the Dutch in their struggle.
- The Armada was the largest fleet that the English had seen. It had to join a Spanish army on the Dutch coast, before sailing to England. But English ships, weapons and tactics prevented the Armada from joining that army. Bad weather did not help the Spanish either. The Spanish Armada was scattered. The Spanish could not invade England.

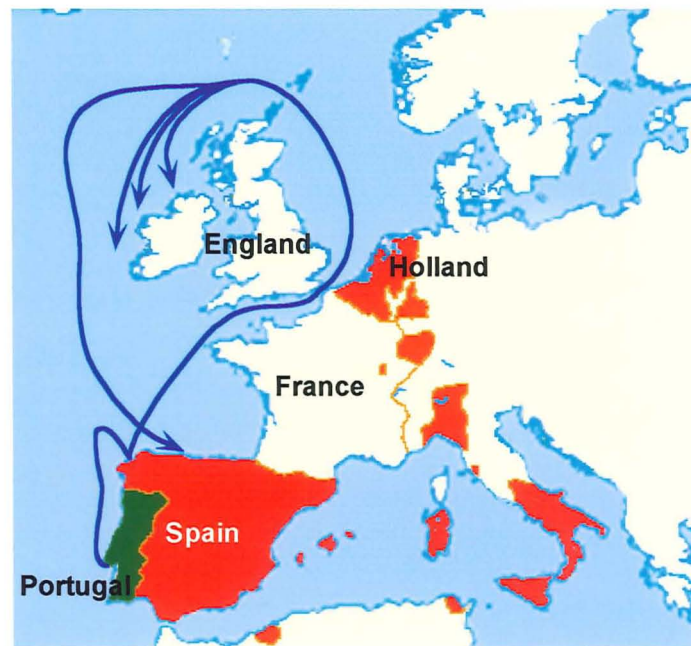


## THE SPANISH ARMADA MAPS

### 1. The Spanish Empire and Portugal.



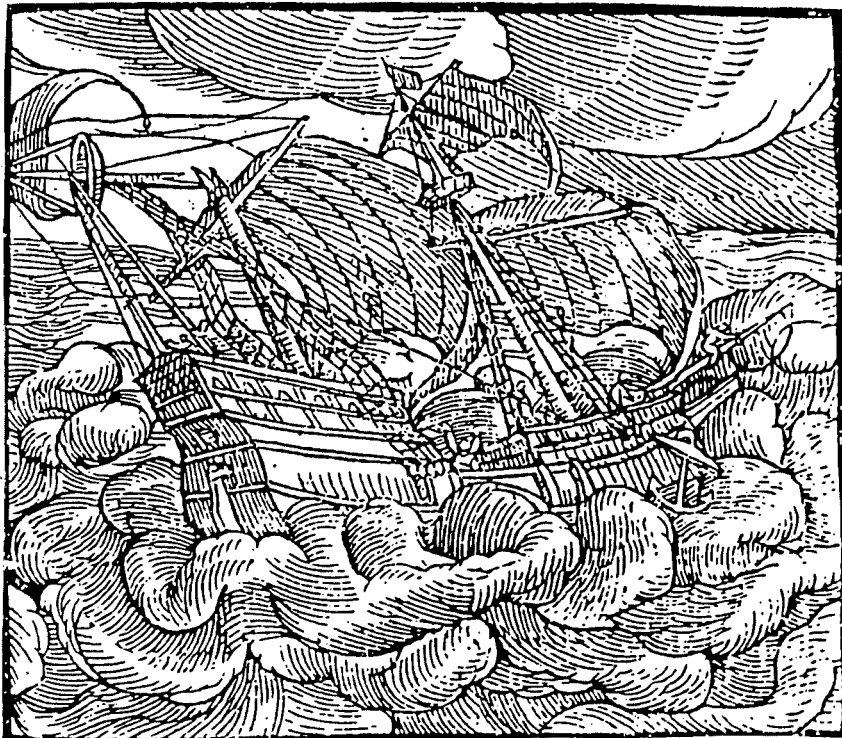
### 2. The Spanish Empire in Europe and the route of the Spanish armada.



NAME:		DATE:
COURSE:	AGE:	
SCHOOL:	BIRTHDAY:	

## TASK-SET I

# THE SPANISH ARMADA



## STORY 1

### Chapter 1

Before the sending of the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth feared the power of Philip. He could help the English Catholics who did not want her as Queen. Elizabeth was determined to keep England Pro-testant and independent from Philip. She sent armies to help Dutch Protestants in their struggle against Spain.

Philip wanted to avoid religious divisions to keep his Empire together and tried to stop any foreign interference in his countries. In 1588, Philip decided to send an Armada to invade England, but he did not succeed.

### Chapter 2

After the Armada's defeat in 1588, the Spanish said: "We have lost our reputation as invincible warriors". Philip lost some of his subjects' confidence.

Queen Elizabeth became more popular in England. The English thought God was on their side; they said: "God blew and they were scattered". Philip still sent new Armadas, although they did not succeed because of storms. Elizabeth decided then to spend more money on new fleets.

Although England continued to be an independent, Protestant, country, the defeat of the Armada did not prevent Philip II from being the most powerful king in the Western world.

The Dutch revolt against Spain continued. It actually went on until 1648, when Holland finally became a separate country.

### Chapter 3

In the Seventeenth century, the English and also the Dutch continued to attack Spanish colonies in America and Asia.

Different uprisings happened in areas of Spain itself. They were backed up by other countries, such as France or England. The size of the Spanish Empire made it hard to keep it together. Even so, Portugal was the only part of the Spanish Empire (apart from Holland) to become independent from Spain before 1700.

During this same period of one hundred years or so, the English managed to establish settlers in North America, mainly in parts that the Spanish had ignored.

In 1700, Spain still controlled more land in Western Europe than any other country, and still had the biggest Empire in America and the Pacific.

## STORY 2

### Chapter 1

Before the sending of the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth feared the power of Philip. Holland belonged to the Spanish Empire, so the Spanish controlled some of the seas round English shores. Elizabeth wanted to prevent this.

Philip had to face English attacks on his merchant ships and a revolt in Holland, backed up by the English. In 1588, he sent an Armada to invade England, but he did not succeed.

### Chapter 2

After the Armada's defeat in 1588, the war between Spain and England went on. English ships still attacked Spanish mer-chant ships.

England continued to be an independent country. Holland also benefited from the defeat of 1588; Spain accepted that Holland was no longer part of the Spanish Empire; Holland became an independent country sixty years later.

The defeat of the Armada was a decisive setback to Philip II and the Spanish Empire. It was the beginning of the Empire's decline. In the hundred years that followed, the Spanish economy gradually became weaker.

The war cost a lot, and state debts increased both in England and Spain. In spite of these economic problems, Spain had one of the most powerful armies until 1800.

### Chapter 3

In the Seventeenth century, the English established settlers in North America and in India.

During the Eighteenth century, Britain gained control of the world's sea routes by defeating Spain and France in a series of wars, such as in Trafalgar (1805). Spain lost most of its European Empire in 1713, and most of its American colonies in 1830.

From the 1800s, the invention and use of new machines allowed Britain to be the first country in selling industrial goods to the rest of the world. By the end of the Nineteenth century, Britain had a big Empire. Most of its countries became independent by 1950.

Though the Spanish economy developed much later, nowadays both England and Spain are two well-off countries within the European Union, and today more people throughout the world speak Spanish than any other language except English and Chinese.



**QUESTION 1**

Some historians think that the Spanish Armada's defeat was really important; others think it wasn't. What do you think? Was it important or not? Explain why it mattered or why it did not matter.

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**QUESTION 2**

Does the Spanish Armada's defeat matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?

Choose one answer (YES or NO)

**YES:** If you think it does matter the same, explain how.

**NO:** If you think it doesn't matter the same, explain why not.

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**QUESTION 3**

**What makes things important in history, generally speaking?**

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QUESTION 4

- Story 1 says that "the defeat of the Armada did not prevent Philip II from being the most powerful king in the Western world".
- Story 2 says that "the defeat of the Armada was a decisive setback to Philip II and the Spanish Empire".

Does this mean

- ☐ (a) no one knows because we weren't there?
- ☐ (b) we haven't got enough information to find out?
- ☐ (c) historians usually take sides?
- ☐ (d) the sentences answer different questions?
- ☐ (e) historians just think differently from each other?
- ☐ (f) one of the stories must be wrong?

Which of the sentences (a) to (f) is nearest to how you think?

Choose one sentence and tick the box next to it.

QUESTION 5

Explain why you thought that was the best sentence (a-f).

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QUESTION 6

If the sentence you chose (a-f) is not exactly what you think, explain what you really think.

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QUESTION 7

Read again the two statements you read before:

- Story 1 says that "the defeat of the Armada did not prevent Philip II from being the most powerful king in the Western world".
- Story 2 says that "the defeat of the Armada was a decisive setback to Philip II and the Spanish Empire".

How could you decide which is best?

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*Some things that happen seem to make a big difference to what happens next, but it's not always easy to decide.*

*What difference did the defeat of the Armada make?*

### QUESTION 8

**8.0. Look at the following dates and read the sentences in the boxes.**

**8.1. Decide which of those sentences have some relation with the Armada's defeat and tick the box next to them.**

**8.2. Decide which of those sentences have NO relation with the Armada's defeat and cross the box next to them.**

**TIME** →

Defeat of the Armada- 1588			Defeat of the Armada - 1588		
?			?		
1588			~1590		
1	Philip lost some of his subjects' confidence.		4	Elizabeth decided to invest more in fleets.	
2	Elizabeth became more popular in England.		5	Holland survived as a Protestant country.	
3	English Protestants' morale rose.		6	Wheat harvest in areas of Spain failed.	

**TIME** →

Defeat of the Armada - 1588			Defeat of the Armada - 1588		
?			?		
1668			1713		
11	Portugal became independent from the Spanish Empire.		12	Spain lost its European Empire.	

**TIME** →

Defeat of the Armada - 1588			Defeat of the Armada - 1588		
?			?		
1830			~1850		
15	The Spanish American colonies became independent.		16	Britain sold industrial goods all over the world.	

**REMEMBER:**

*You may think that the defeat of the Armada made a difference to more than one thing at once. If so, tick more than one box.*

*But don't tick a box next to a thing if the defeat of the Armada didn't make a difference to that thing.*

Timeline 1: ~1600			Timeline 2: ~1650		
Defeat of the Armada - 1588			Defeat of the Armada - 1588		
?			?		
~1600			~1650		
7	The English established settlers in North America..		9	Spanish economy declined.	
8	State debts increased in England and Spain.		10	Holland became independent.	

Timeline 3: ~1750-1800			Timeline 4: 1805		
Defeat of the Armada - 1588			Defeat of the Armada - 1588		
?			?		
~1750-1800			1805		
13	Invention and use of new machines in Britain.		14	The Spanish navy is defeated by the English in Trafalgar.	

Timeline 5: 1898			Timeline 6: 1947		
Defeat of the Armada - 1588			Defeat of the Armada - 1588		
?			?		
1898			1947		
17	Spain lost Cuba, Puerto Rico and Philippines in a war with the USA.		18	India became independent from the British Empire.	

QUESTION 9

Three different historians wrote the following accounts:

**A**

Philip II's contemporaries admired the Spanish ability to gather (for the Armada) such a big army and fleet. In spite of the Armada's defeat, Philip still was the most powerful king in the Western world.

**B**

The Armada's defeat was the greatest disaster of the reign. After that, Spanish people lost confidence in their king; it led the government to borrow more money and to raise taxes; and it stopped the Spanish finishing off the Dutch rebellion.

**C**

After the Armada's defeat, England built up a strong navy and it came to depend more and more on a kind of trade which involved long-distance sea journeys. From 1588 onwards, England would begin to send settlers across the Atlantic to America; England made more effective the defence of the seas round its shores; and it started to oppose to any one power getting control of Europe.

**9.1. Do you think the three accounts agree about the importance of the Spanish Armada's defeat? Circle YES or NO and explain your answer.**

YES / NO

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(If you circled 'NO' in 9.1, answer 9.2.)

9.2. Why do you think the accounts disagree about what is important?

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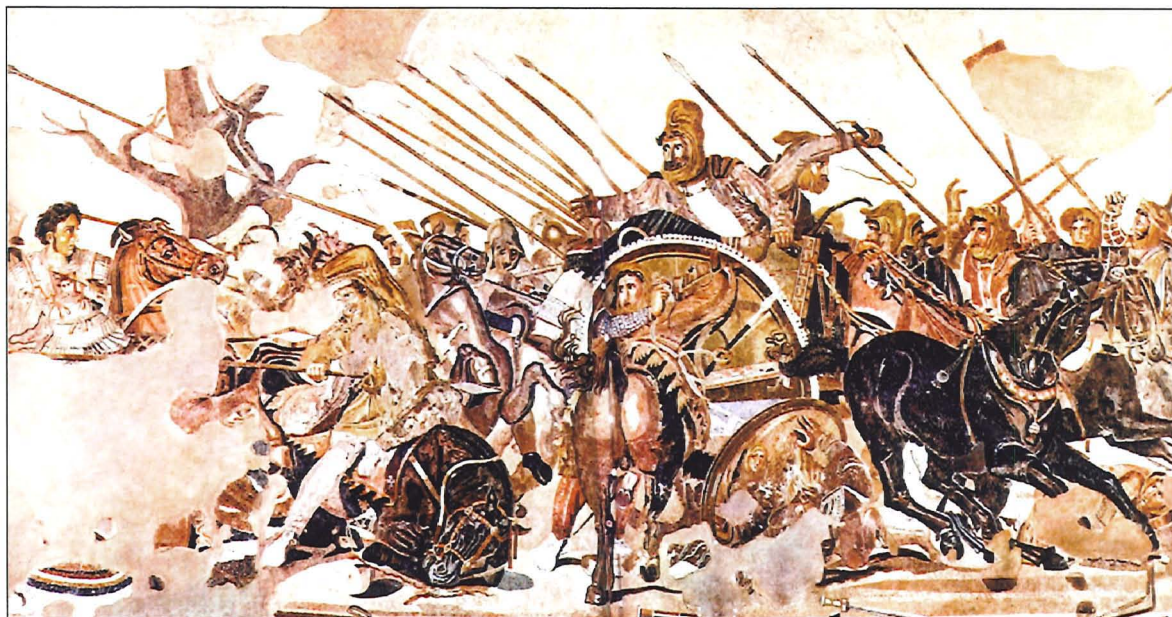
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THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

**APPENDIX VI**

## ALEXANDER THE GREAT (356-323 BC)



**Alexander and the king of Persia in the battle of Issus**

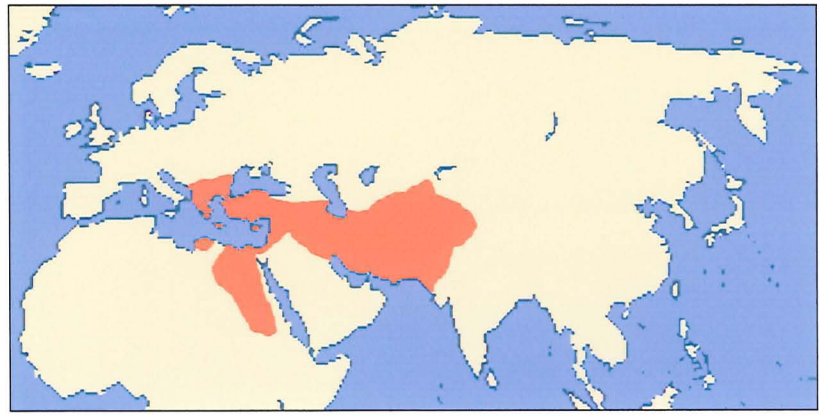
- Alexander was the son of Philip, the king of Macedonia (North of Greece). Alexander was twenty years old when he himself became king of Macedonia. He was taught by a very famous Greek philosopher called Aristotle. He had already the reputation of being a great warrior. Once Alexander had all the Greek states under control, he began a military campaign against the Persian Empire, to enlarge his kingdom.
- Alexander invaded Asia Minor (which belonged to Persia) in the year 334 BC. In the next eleven years, he won victory after victory, reaching as far as India (river Indus), where his army refused to go farther East (see maps). Alexander, who became known as "the Great", died of fever in Babylon in the year 323 BC.



**Alexander, king of Macedonia and Conqueror of the Persian Empire**



# ALEXANDER THE GREAT MAPS





NAME:		DATE:
COURSE:	AGE:	
SCHOOL:	BIRTHDAY:	

## TASK-SET 2

# ALEXANDER THE GREAT



## **STORY 1**

### **Chapter 1**

The Greeks feared the Persians, who had been powerful enemies for a long time.

Alexander became king of Macedonia (in the north of Greece) when his father was killed. He took over his father's plans to rule Greece and invade Persia. Thanks to his father's reforms, Alexander had a well trained army and efficient weapons.

Alexander's military success was due to his skill as a general, and to the loyalty he inspired in his troops. He shared his soldiers' dangers and was injured many times in battle.

### **Chapter 2**

On his advance throughout the Persian Empire, Alexander appointed Persians, not just Greeks and Macedonians, as leaders and generals.

He built more than seventy new towns. They were built partly to provide a base for governing and defending the area round about them.

Alexander tried to adopt the local habits of the peoples he conquered, to gain their loyalty. But Macedonian generals often resented the fact that Alexander considered all races in his empire as equals. Besides, the Greeks thought their culture was superior to that of the Macedonians or the Persians.

### **Chapter 3**

Alexander was called 'great' because of his military genius. But his ideal of an empire based on Greek culture and racial equality was never achieved.

After his death, when he was only thirty - two years old, Alexander's generals fought between them and his empire fell apart.

Most of the towns Alexander built quickly fell into ruins after his death. The kingdoms which succeeded Alexander dominated the Greek speaking world, but not for very long. Two hundred years later they were invaded by Rome, which would become a big empire.

## **STORY 2**

### **Chapter 1**

The Greeks feared the Persians, who had been powerful enemies for a long time.

When Alexander became king of Macedonia (in the north of Greece), he decided to invade Persia. He had a well trained army and efficient weapons.

Alexander's campaigns were not just of conquest; he also wanted to explore new lands. From the beginning of his expeditions, he took with him experts in history, science and geography.

### **Chapter 2**

In his march towards the East, Alexander founded more than seventy towns, most of them with his name. Each town had around ten thousand people from different races. The city of Alexandria in Egypt still bears his name today.

Alexander opened up new trade routes from the West to the East. He introduced a single silver coin to enable merchants to buy and sell goods anywhere in his empire.

### **Chapter 3**

He was only thirty-two years old when he died, but after him the world opened out; it seemed to people a much bigger place, in the way it did later on after the discovery of America.

The towns Alexander built were one of his longest-lasting achievements. These towns helped spread Greek ideas and ways of living into all the lands he ruled over.

In Roman times, Julius Caesar, Augustus and other Roman emperors visited Alexander's tomb in Alexandria (Egypt), to pay tribute to him.

For the next fifteen hundred years, many people wrote about the life of Alexander, not only in Europe, but in Persia and India as well. Even much nearer our own times, in the Nineteenth century, the French emperor Napoleon used to read about Alexander's life to learn from his example.

**QUESTION 1**

Some historians think that what Alexander did was really important; others think it was not. What do you think? Was it important or not? Explain why it mattered or why it did not matter.

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**QUESTION 2**

Does what Alexander did matter the same in both stories (Story 1 and Story 2)?

Choose one answer (YES or NO).

**YES:** If you think it does matter the same, explain how.

**NO:** If you think it doesn't matter the same, explain why not.

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QUESTION 3

- Story 1 says that "Most of the towns Alexander built quickly fell into ruins after his death".
- Story 2 says that "The towns Alexander built were one of his longest-lasting achievements".

Does this mean

- ☐ (a) no one knows because we weren't there?
- ☐ (b) we haven't got enough information to find out?
- ☐ (c) historians usually take sides?
- ☐ (d) the sentences answer different questions?
- ☐ (e) historians just think differently from each other?
- ☐ (f) one of the stories must be wrong?

Which of the sentences (a) to (f) is nearest to how you think?

Choose one sentence and tick the box next to it.

QUESTION 4

Explain why you thought the sentence you chose (a-f) was the best sentence.

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QUESTION 5

If the sentence you chose (a-f) is not exactly what you think, explain what you really think.

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QUESTION 6

Read again the two statements you read before:

- Story 1 says that "Most of the towns Alexander built quickly fell into ruins after his death".
- Story 2 says that "The towns Alexander built were one of his longest-lasting achievements".

How could you decide which is best?

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QUESTION 7

*Sometimes it is easy to decide why something is important in history, but it is not always the case. Can you tell the best reasons to explain why Alexander's campaigns were important ?*

- Read the following sentences (a-h).
- Decide which of those sentences are good to explain why Alexander's campaigns were important and tick the box next to them.
- Decide which of those sentences are not so good to explain why Alexander's campaigns were important and cross the box next to them.

What **Alexander** did was /wasn't so important because

- ☐ (a) new lands were explored, so far unknown by the Greeks and Macedonians?
- ☐ (b) most of the towns he built bore his name?
- ☐ (c) many people learned from his example, even hundreds of years later?
- ☐ (d) the towns he built helped spread Greek ideas and language throughout his empire?
- ☐ (e) he was injured many times in battle?
- ☐ (f) the world opened out, in the way it did later on after the discovery of America?
- ☐ (g) he was a very skilful general?
- ☐ (h) he considered all races in his empire as equals?

**QUESTION 8**

- Is there one best sentence (a-h) to explain why what Alexander did was important?

Circle YES or NO and give your answer only in one of the following paragraphs.

- If you circled YES, explain why in the 'YES' paragraph.

- If you circled NO, explain why in the 'NO' paragraph.

**YES / NO**

**YES:** Say which one is the best sentence (a-h) and explain your answer.

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**NO:** Say why there is no one best sentence (a-h) to explain why what Alexander did was important.

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QUESTION 9

Put the sentences (a-h) in order of importance. If you think sentence (a) is the main reason why Alexander's campaigns were important, put a 1 in the box next to it; then put a 2 next to the next important reason, a 3 for the next, and so on.

If you think two or more sentences hold the same importance, put the same number in the box next to it.

What **Alexander** did was/wasn't so important because

- ☐ (a) new lands were explored, so far unknown by the Greeks and Macedonians?
- ☐ (b) most of the towns he built bore his name?
- ☐ (c) many people learned from his example, even hundreds of years later?
- ☐ (d) the towns he built helped spread Greek ideas and language throughout his empire?
- ☐ (e) he was injured many times in battle?
- ☐ (f) the world opened out, in the way it did later on after the discovery of America?
- ☐ (g) he was a very skilful general?
- ☐ (h) he considered all races in his empire as equals?

ONCE AGAIN, THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION!!



**APPENDIX VII**

**Levels of progression:  
individual consistency across tasks and questions**

**TABLE I.**

Individual degree of consistency (% of agreement) across TASKS (SA and AG) by year-group within levels of progression in types of significance in Questions 1 and 2

**QUESTION 1**

		Yr 8		Yr 10		Yr 12	
		En	Sp	En	Sp	En	Sp
SA/AG	N	14	12	11	12	14	7
	%	58.3	50.0	45.8	50.0	58.3	29.1

En (n=24)

Total **En** (n=72): 31 (43%)

Sp (n=24)

Total **Sp** (n=72): 31 (43%)

**QUESTION 2**

		Yr 8		Yr 10		Yr 12	
		En	Sp	En	Sp	En	Sp
SA/AG	N	14	11	10	13	11	10
	%	58.3	45.8	41.6	54.1	45.8	41.6

En (n=24)

Total **En** (n=72): 35 (48.6%)

Sp (n=24)

Total **Sp** (n=72): 34 (47.2%)

**TABLE II.**

Individual degree of consistency across QUESTIONS (Q1 and Q2) in each task-set (SA and AG) by year group within levels of progression in types of significance

**THE SPANISH ARMADA**

<u>Question1</u>		Yr 8		Yr 10		Yr 12	
<u>Question2</u>		En	Sp	En	Sp	En	Sp
<b>SA</b>	<b>N</b>	9	15	12	7	10	9
	<b>%</b>	37.5	62.5	50.0	29.1	41.6	37.5

En (n=24)

Total **En** (n=72): 31 (43.0%)

Sp (n=24)

Total **Sp** (n=72): 31 (43.0%)**ALEXANDER THE GREAT**

<u>Question1</u>		Yr 8		Yr 10		Yr 12	
<u>Question2</u>		En	Sp	En	Sp	En	Sp
<b>AG</b>	<b>N</b>	14	10	8	10	11	10
	<b>%</b>	58.3	41.6	33.3	41.6	45.8	41.6

En (n=24)

Total **En** (n=72): 31 (43.0%)

Sp (n=24)

Total **Sp** (n=72): 30 (41.6%)